

# **Educators' understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence: a mixed methods study.**

by

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## **Abbreviations and Terms**

|         |                                                              |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACER    | Australian Council for Education Research                    |
| AEDC    | Australian Early Development Census                          |
| AIHW    | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare                   |
| ATSIEP  | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan  |
| COAG    | Council of Australian Governments                            |
| CRT     | Critical Race Theory                                         |
| DEEWR   | Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  |
| EYLF    | Early Years Learning Framework                               |
| HREOC   | Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission                    |
| NAIDOC  | National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee |
| NAEYC   | National Association for the Education of Young Children     |
| NAPLAN  | National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy        |
| NATSISS | National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey |
| OECD    | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development       |
| RCIADIC | Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody           |
| UN      | United Nations                                               |

### **Aboriginal/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**

The term 'Aboriginal' is the preferred term used by Aboriginal participants involved in this research. The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' have been adopted and maintained throughout the thesis to ensure consistency.

### **Aboriginal peoples**

The use of the term 'Aboriginal peoples' acknowledges the distinct language and nation groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

### **Indigenous/Indigenous Australia**

The term 'Indigenous' is used to refer to international Indigenous peoples.

The terms 'Indigenous' and 'Indigenous Australia' are used when directly quoting and referring to scholarly work including when referring to collective Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous Standpoint issues.

### **Language group/Country**

Terms used to refer to the geographical location of specific Aboriginal peoples.

### **Aboriginal knowledges**

The term 'Aboriginal knowledges' in this research is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, ways of knowing, ways of being, ways of doing, perspectives and viewpoints. The term is pluralised to indicate the multiplicity and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities across Australia. The term 'Indigenous knowledges' is used to acknowledge the multiplicity of Indigenous knowledges worldwide (Dei 2000; Martin 2003).

## **Declaration**

This thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, are clearly acknowledged.

Karen Sinclair



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## **Abstract**

This research explores educators' conceptual understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. An expectation from Australian education authorities is that educators will strengthen their cultural competence (DEEWR 2010, p. 21). The aim of this research is to explore educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. This study utilises two methods. First, Q methodology examines educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence with the use of correlation and factor analytic techniques. Secondly, the research adopts an Indigenous methodology of yarning through semi-structured interviews to gain a comprehensive account of educators' understandings and perspectives towards cultural competence to enable new understandings to emerge.

Foucauldian concepts of normalization and governmentality and Critical Race Theory function as significant frameworks to 'trouble' educators' perspectives on cultural competence. Such frameworks allow educators to become critically aware of their understanding of cultural competence and to rethink their approaches. Set in the context of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2003), the findings examine cultural competence by viewing it as a discourse that dominates our understandings and actions in order to privilege some and perpetuate embedded racism in others. The findings argue that when cultural competence is presented as a competency, it objectifies and essentialises Aboriginal cultures and accentuates a power-dynamic between the 'expert' and the 'other'. However, there is also evidence of some educator's disruption of the dominant discourses of cultural competence.

Moreover, the findings suggest that when educators begin from a position of not knowing and work from a stance of cultural humility, this can lead to a critical standpoint in which authoritative constructions of cultural competence are questioned. I argue that through a combination of enacting a pedagogy of listening with deconstructive talk, reframing of the discourse of cultural competence can occur to explore 'untested feasibilities' (Freire 1997, p. 83). To this end, emphasis is placed upon spaces of encounters with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with the aim of co-constructing cultural competence work and contribute to counter-stories that privilege Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing cultural competence.

# CHAPTER ONE: Discourse, power and knowledge in education

## 1.1 Introduction

The early years of a child's life is recognised as the most important period in education. Equally, a good beginning is also recognised as the foundation for future health and well-being (Jordan, Tseng, Coombs, Kennedy & Borland 2014; Elliot 2006). Australian Commonwealth and state and territory governments recognise the importance of early childhood in the strategy paper *Investing in the Early years—a national early childhood development strategy* (Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2009). The strategy is a national commitment to strengthening and sustaining the early years of a child's life and is a response to evidence that all children have a right to experience a positive early childhood experience to create an improved future for themselves and for the nation (COAG 2009; Elliot 2006). A key mechanism for achieving the strategy includes the implementation of Australia's first national curriculum, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009). One of the core purposes of the EYLF is for educators to reconceptualise their current professional knowledge to inform key decision-making in pedagogy and practice.

A key aim of the EYLF is for educators to develop cultural competence. Indeed, the literature about cultural competence in the early years affirms that the success of Aboriginal students lies in educators developing cultural competence (Guilfoyle, Sims, Saggars & Hutchins 2010; Bowes, Kitson & Burns 2010; Sims 2011). There is a degree of ambiguity that surrounds the term 'cultural competence' despite its frequent use by writers and researchers. More concerning is that a large percentage of Aboriginal children between 3.5 and 4.5 years of age do not attend any formal early childhood service (Sims 2011; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2016). This research is concerned with educator's conceptualisations of cultural competence.

To position myself within the research is important to contextualise the study. I acknowledge that I occupy a subjective position in which my experiences as an Aboriginal educator have an impact on my perceptions and opinion about various topics related to education for Aboriginal children. Firstly, I identify as an Aboriginal person from South Australia. Additionally, I am Ngarrindjeri.<sup>1</sup> My mother is Ngarrindjeri and my father European. My mother's mother is Lampard and my mother's paternal grandmother is Kropinyeri. Providing surnames is the protocol for introducing one's self to other

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<sup>1</sup> The Ngarrindjeri nation is the major Aboriginal language group who occupied, and still live along the Lower Murray, Coorong and Lakes area of South Australia.

Aboriginal people, 'to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connections can be made ... and relations established' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. xv). This also places me in connection to my community.<sup>2</sup> As Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 15) argues, this connects and locates our knowledge, because '[t]o write in the absence of connection to community could be perceived and interpreted as vicarious' (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, p. 15). Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 12) also affirms that in positioning oneself throughout the research process, the researcher is 'claiming a genealogical, cultural and political set of experiences'.

I have worked as an educator for 20 years. My first role was as an Aboriginal Education Worker, which entailed advocating for and providing Aboriginal student support. In this role, I worked at several junior primary and high schools in the western suburbs of Adelaide. I then moved into curriculum in the area of Aboriginal Education and worked as an early years field worker, supporting preschools to implement Aboriginal perspectives in their curriculum. It was at this time, that I first observed how the system privileges one form of knowledge over another. I consequently decided to become an early years teacher and thus began my Early Childhood Degree at the University of South Australia. During this time, I continued to work in various roles within the SA Department of Education. Upon completing my teaching degree, I predominantly taught students in the early years.

Throughout my experiences in education, one of my 'perceived' roles as an Aboriginal person and teacher has been to assist non-Aboriginal educators to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum; to broker the relationship between non-Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal parents and families and to organise special events related to National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance (NAIDOC) week.<sup>3</sup> I was also asked to tackle the 'problem' of non-attendance and the perceived 'misbehaviour' of Aboriginal children. In many cases, blame was placed on the Aboriginal child, their culture and/or their perceived 'disadvantage'. Very rarely did teachers reflect on their classroom practices, pedagogy or underlying beliefs about Aboriginal children, nor did they engage with the local Aboriginal community. It is important that I point out that I have met many non-Aboriginal teachers who hold high expectations of their Aboriginal students and who make every effort to consider what they need to do differently to improve all students' learning. Nevertheless, there are still teachers and school leaders who have little idea of the ways in which their perceptions and values contribute to continued subordination of Aboriginal

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<sup>2</sup> When I talk about 'community', I refer to the complex network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live locally and feel a connection to the place/country and local area they connect to.

<sup>3</sup> NAIDOC – National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee. Held in the first week of July each year, NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

cultures, histories and perspectives. In these contexts, Aboriginal ways of knowing are made to seem fabricated and fictional instead of equally valid perspectives and knowledges. These perceptions then produce certain effects and they subjectively construct and endorse ideas of 'difference' which ultimately influence pedagogical practices and Aboriginal children's learning outcomes. Thus, even if Aboriginal perspectives are incorporated into the curriculum, they are sometimes not effectively represented at a classroom level.

There was one instance where I asked a school principal whether they had considered employing a specialist teacher to work with all teachers across the school to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. Not surprisingly, her response to me was 'Oh no, we don't have enough Aboriginal students here to do that!' I was shocked that there was still a belief that one needs to have many Aboriginal students – or any at all – to embed Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. I felt discouraged. My response was to remind the principal that it was about engaging all children in understanding the importance of Aboriginal cultures, histories, knowledges and languages and a significant way to engage with the local Aboriginal community and parents who were eager to collaborate with the school. The principal responded, 'we can't employ an Aboriginal Hourly Paid Instructor to support us as other priorities have been identified within the district that are more of a priority'. Who was asking for funding? This was an example of displacing responsibility for equity and social justice. Although this was only one leader and one example, these types of conversations continue to be an occurrence for Aboriginal parents and educators.

As I became experienced in the education system, I gained an increasing awareness of how deficit discourses and discursive practices contribute to the normalisation of Aboriginal children as inferior to their non-Aboriginal counterparts and needing extra support to 'close the gap'. Within the deficit discourse, I observed a certain amount of negativity aimed towards Aboriginal children and their families. The amount of deficit talk that occurred in staff rooms was astounding. Each day, through my practices and conversations, I had to challenge these normalised ways of viewing Aboriginal children and their families. Deficit discourses position Aboriginal students as 'other'. I eventually surmised that the function of the deficit ideology was to deflect attention away from the systemic conditions and socio-political context that exacerbates the inequities (Gorski 2010, p. 6).

My observations and experiences showed me that the challenge for educators was and remains knowing how to best support Aboriginal students while also meeting their cultural and learning needs. In this thesis, I question how educators can move from deficit discourses and their associated pedagogies and practices towards more socially just pedagogies in which Aboriginal knowledges, perspectives and ways of knowing are valued within curriculum. There has been extensive research on the correlations between attendance and improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal children (Armstrong, Buckley, Lonsdale, Milgate, Kneebone, Cook, & Skelton 2012; Purdie & Buckley 2010; Sims 2011). Several studies have also assessed Aboriginal students' attitudes towards teachers and education (Godfrey Partington, Richer & Harslett 2001; Rahman 2010). However, within this field, research on educators tends to focus on how Aboriginal perspectives have been embedded in early childhood curriculum. The most recent example is the work of Melinda Miller (2013) in her thesis, 'Action for change: embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in early childhood education curricula'. Miller's (2013) research examines the effect of whiteness<sup>4</sup> on non-Aboriginal educators' work in respect to the embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in early childhood curricula. Miller (2013) found that the practices of educators reinforced (rather than reduced) colonial discourses in early childhood education. Miller's work represents just one significant example of contemporary research that has specifically focussed on issues related to early childhood education for Aboriginal children. However, Miller's research did not elaborate on or highlight the significance (or insignificance) of cultural competence as a key factor in promoting and stimulating deeper level critical thinking and socially just practices for embedding Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum.

My original 'pondering' was around the exclusion or marginalisation of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum. Further reflection was on research and writing that advocates for cultural competence as a prerequisite for educators to effectively engage with and embed Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum (DEEWR 2010; Perso 2012, 2015; Price 2012). Although I have had many conversations with educators about cultural competence, I was still left wondering what educators really knew about this idea. This led me to more specific questioning about educators' understanding of cultural competence. What do educators know about the notion of cultural competence? What is its meaning in the context of education and social justice? I questioned the discourses that shaped educators' understanding of this concept. I was starting to believe that many non-

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<sup>4</sup> Whiteness refers to the dominant structural arrangements and ideologies that maintain power and privilege by legitimating the status quo. (See Castagno 2014, p. 7)

Aboriginal teachers had difficulty moving beyond popularly sanctioned discourses about the ‘disadvantaged’ Aboriginal child. I also questioned the usefulness of the concept of cultural competence from an individual point of view, and its influence on pedagogy. It is an important area to investigate as the beliefs and values held can strongly influence the interactions between educators and child and impact on the discourse of cultural competence more widely.

Discourses shape ‘truth’ by negating other potentially valid ways of knowing and doing; they consequently influence how people understand the world and how they act in it. I was also concerned by the significantly low numbers of Aboriginal children between the ages of three and five attending early childhood services, including preschool. Fordham and Schwab (2007, p. 3) suggest that such non-attendance is partly due to their Aboriginality. I originally found this idea problematic, but my experience has taught me that contemporary discourse is an active agent that continues to suppress Aboriginal perspectives within the curriculum and the education system. Moreover, discourse surrounding cultural awareness and cultural competence has continued the Eurocentric positioning of Aboriginal peoples and cultures as inferior.

My lived experiences therefore were the point of entry for exploration and inquiry in a highly-contested space (Nakata 2007a). To this end, introducing my standpoint clarifies my research interests to the audience.<sup>5</sup> My standpoint is not fixed and concrete, but is formed through critical reflection and through experiences that are constitutive of what many Aboriginal people understand within education. It is about critically questioning discourses of knowledge and truth to ‘develop deeper understandings of how we are positioned at the interface of different knowledge systems, histories, traditions and practices’ (Nakata 2007b, p. 12). I acknowledge that we are all limited in our experiences, our standpoints are fractional and so is the knowledge we produce (Moreton-Robinson 2000; Nakata 2007b). Nonetheless, I embarked on this learning journey with a desire to learn more.

## ***1.2 Researching cultural competence***

The Council of Australian Governments is committed to ‘closing the gap in educational achievements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 3). The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is one such measure that seeks to reach this aim. The EYLF is a framework of principles, practices and

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<sup>5</sup> Standpoint encapsulates our position, who we are and how we see ourselves in relation to others and to society (see Walter 2010, p. 53).

outcomes designed to improve professional judgements and pedagogical practices within the early years of education with the intent of improving professional knowledge and confidence (DEEWR 2010, p. 8). The framework was designed to enable educators to use a repertoire of practices to achieve learning outcomes for all children (DEEWR 2010, p. 5).

The EYLF contains explicit statements about expectations relative to improving outcomes for Aboriginal children. Within the framework, 'Respect for Diversity' is a fundamental principle and 'Cultural Competence' is a key practice (DEEWR 2010, p. 5). Further, the EYLF acknowledges that cultural competence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is 'distinctly different from the broad idea of respecting all cultures' (DEEWR 2010, p. 24; Goodwin 2012). To this end, the EYLF includes a specific section for 'growing educators' competence in 'working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures' (DEEWR 2010, p. 24). Culturally competent educators are described in the EYLF as educators who 'respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences' (DEEWR 2010, p. 21).

The specific objective of this research was to investigate educators' understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence as outlined in the EYLF. The framework seeks to ensure that 'we all strengthen our cultural competence' (DEEWR 2010, p. 21). Despite being frequently used in the literature, a degree of uncertainty surrounds the term 'cultural competence' and there is no consensus as to its meaning. In the EYLF, cultural competence is described as 'the ability to interact respectfully, constructively and positively with children, families, staff and community' (DEEWR 2010, p. 21). However, cultural competence could be interpreted in a myriad of ways.

There is clearly a need to ascertain educators' understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence to allow new understandings to emerge so that deficit views can be challenged and deconstructed. Conversely, the EYLF acknowledges that cultural competence is an 'evolving concept and our engagement with it will contribute to its evolution' (DEEWR 2010, p. 21). Therefore, exploring educators' understandings of cultural competence and its associated discourse is important. Language and discourse is an important issue because they are mechanisms or systems that have power to influence representations that advantage some and disadvantages others. Hall and Gieben (1992, p. 205) also insist that language and discourse 'operate in relation to power – they are part of the way power circulates and is contested'. The question of whether a 'discourse is true or

false is less important than whether it is effective in practice’ (Hall 2006, p. 169). The discourse prevalent within the EYLF has been dominated by non-Aboriginal voices and is produced in a curriculum framework and pedagogy that belongs to and reflects ‘white interests’ (Vass 2012, p. 89).

However, the question remains: what is cultural competence and what does this mean for educators? The EYLF acknowledges that, as educators, ‘what we believe and think affects what we do and what we do affects what we believe and think’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 14). Due to the problematic fluid nature of cultural competence, exploring educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence is an important area to research, as it is educators’ understandings of the term that is effectively used in practice with Aboriginal children.

The primary aim of the research is to explore educators’ understandings and perspectives on cultural competence. There are two main research questions:

1. What are educators’ understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence as outlined in the EYLF?
2. How do educators describe their proficiency with cultural competence?

### ***1.3 Overview of the methodology and research design***

This research addresses a gap in existing research about educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Several paradigms are considered to fully represent the complexities of human understanding. The methods chosen are influenced by my understanding of how the world works. I position myself as an Aboriginal researcher and therefore draw on Indigenous methodologies to conduct the research. Chapter Three articulates my research journey and my decision to deliberate on the meaning of Western theories through centring my Ngarrindjeri ontology. My personal ways of knowing – the interconnections and interrelationships between people, language and ngatjis<sup>6</sup> – had a significant impact in some shape or form during my research journey. I additionally engaged with the poststructuralist ideas of Michel Foucault to deconstruct language and discourse related to cultural competence. Foucauldian concepts were utilised to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions in the areas of Aboriginal education, history, policy and curriculum.

Cultural competence has been identified as a significant pedagogical practice in the EYLF (DEEWR 2010) and yet, there has not been a strong focus on the concept of cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Ngatji – Ngarrindjeri word for totem.

competence in the education literature. As such, this study uses a mixed method approach to collect data. Mixed method approaches include using multiple and diverse methods for the gathering, analysing and representing of data. This approach intentionally engages with diverse ways of knowing to enable new and multiple understandings to emerge by reconceptualising different epistemologies that value ‘multiple methodological traditions’ (Greene 2005, p. 208).

Quantitative data is typically represented by numerical data and analysed using statistical techniques, while qualitative data is typically collected using open-ended holistic approaches (Tashakkori & Newman 2010). In this research, Q methodology is viewed as a hybrid quantitative-qualitative method that combines the strengths of both research traditions (Watts & Stenner 2005). Q methodology was used to access as many alternative perspectives as possible and, with the use of correlation and factor analytic techniques to group and describe these views to map educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Therefore, an instrument (referred to as Cultural Competence Q Sort) was developed to reveal educators’ understandings and perspectives towards the concept of cultural competence.

Educators’ understandings of cultural competence were also examined through semi-structured interviews using an Indigenous methodology of yarning to allow new understandings to emerge. Five questions guided the process to gain a comprehensive account of educators’ understandings and perspectives towards cultural competence:

1. What is your understanding of cultural competence?
2. What perceptions do you have about the practice of cultural competence, particularly in relation to ‘growing educators’ competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures’, as outlined in the EYLF?
3. In your view, is cultural competence important within the educational setting?
4. How would you describe your level of cultural competence?
5. What structures have supported or constrained your work and the work of your staff when applying culturally competent practices?

The methods chosen were based on their capabilities to: investigate a relatively unexplored phenomenon; be exploratory in nature to allow participants’ voices to prevail; privilege the narratives of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early years educators; and complement the strengths of using a single design to explore the diverse perspectives of educators that

will contribute to a growing area of research and advance understandings of cultural competence.

#### ***1.4 Themes and findings***

This thesis begins with a discussion about the grounds for this research and locates the researchers' standpoint within it. This is followed by a review of research and writing relevant to the research in Chapter Two. The first part reviews writing and reports on Aboriginal education and accompanying policies since colonisation. The review also provides a critique of discourse and practices and a discussion of how they are produced, reproduced and maintained within educational institutions. Policy-making data and data collection methods are also discussed as vehicles that position Aboriginal students within certain types of discourse. The review of the research also provides a selection of Foucauldian scholarship concerned with early childhood education to illuminate how certain truths are positioned and rationalised as normal. The last sections of the review discuss the main conceptual understandings of cultural competence, disrupting normalised narratives and problematising assumptions related to the concept. The review of the research also draws on aspects of Critical Race Theory to highlight the importance of recognising discourses that effectively privilege one form of knowledge over another and the significance of disrupting these discourses that operate discursively to normalise ways of speaking about Aboriginal children and their families.

Chapter Three discusses the methodological and research design approach undertaken in this research. Conceptualising my own lens as an Aboriginal person, I draw on various Australian Aboriginal and international Indigenous scholars in order to conceptualise my own lens as an Aboriginal person. There is also discussion of the two methods used; Q methodology and an Indigenous methodology of yarning. This chapter provides the rationale for the methods selected and the ability of both methods to acknowledge and respect Aboriginal collective and distinct ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2003). This chapter also includes an outline of the sampling and data collection procedures that were adopted in each phase. Justification for the utilisation of both methods are explained along with the limitations of both methods.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five reviews the results derived from the data collected. Chapter Four outlines how a two-factor explanation of the results is chosen based on the statistical procedures used in the Q methodology analysis. The recommended software, PQMethod (version 2.35; Schmlock 2014) is used to analyse the data (Q sorts). There is also

discussion about the workings of PQMethod leading to the discovery of two distinct factors drawn from the data. Chapter Five outlines the process and use of a grounded theory approach to inductively develop themes from the interview data. This section describes the interview process as cyclical and notes the careful attention paid to language, patterns, consistencies and inconsistencies in developing the emergent themes. This section also defines how the data are coded, analysed and interpreted and introduces the three themes from the data through which the participants showcased their understandings and perspectives of cultural competence.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight provide analysis of the research data, beginning with a summary of the results and proceeding with a discussion of the findings in relation to other research. Chapter Six considers the first theme – *Ways of knowing: the normalisation of cultural competence*. This theme is underpinned by concepts of ‘understanding’ and ‘perceptions of cultural competence’ that are also correlated with notions of knowledge, learning, relationships, communities and culture. Critical Race Theory is drawn upon to address the disparities that arise when culture is compartmentalised and when binaries between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children are highlighted. Three unique sections make up Chapter Six and are provided with captions reflective of the data: 1) Understanding cultural competence; 2) The multidimensionality of privilege; and 3) Developing a reflective culture.

Chapter Seven describes the second theme – *Ways of being: policy as paradox*. This theme is symbolised by the concepts of ‘time for learning’, ‘support’ and ‘systemic constraints’. The theme draws upon these concepts to understand the organisational and institutional forces identified by the participants that both support and refute culturally competent practices, including participants’ views on the effectiveness of professional learning and on competency-driven discourses. Three unique sections make up Chapter Seven and are provided with the following captions: 1) Systemic constraints; 2) Passive approaches and being ‘nice’; and 3) Quantifying cultural competence.

Chapter Eight discusses the third theme – *Ways of doing: being open to possibilities*. This theme comprises notions of ‘beginning a journey’, the processes of ‘learning’, ‘growing’ and ‘developing’. Emphasis is also placed on educators acting intentionally to contest, critique and re-negotiate discourses related to cultural competence. Three unique sections make up Chapter Eight and are provided with the following captions: 1) A learning journey, 2) Ethical encounters, and 3) Spaces of encounters.

Chapter Nine summarises the research and discusses its implications both at a theoretical and practical level. This research was unable to encompass the entire array of educators' understandings and perspectives about cultural competence. Even so, the conclusion summarises the journey undertaken by educators in unsettling and resettling discourses of cultural competence. It also discusses the potential development of more informed and professional conversations among educators worldwide.

### ***1.5 Conclusion***

This chapter has introduced the research problem, discussing the importance of the early years of education in Australia. The significance of the research problem emphasises the importance of encapsulating educators' understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence, contributing to analysis on the discourse of cultural competence. The theoretical and Indigenous standpoint issues were discussed in the context of the design of the research. The data collection methods were introduced and a brief outline of the thesis provided. The following chapter reviews the research and writing on cultural competence in education and begins with an exploration of the interrelationships between discourse, power and knowledge.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Regimes of truth in early childhood education**

### ***2.1 Introduction***

Over many years there has been extensive research on Aboriginal education at all levels of education, including the early years of education. Some of this research indicates that inequalities in early childhood for Aboriginal children in Australia are significant for educational outcomes in later years (Bowes & Grace 2014). This research draws on poststructuralist theories to analyse, interpret and unpack the discourse around cultural competence as a pedagogical practice. This research demonstrates how discourse operates to shape what educators believe, how they make meaning and how they act upon these meanings in their world.

This chapter draws on the work of Foucault (1980) who explores the interrelationships between discourses, power and knowledge. This chapter reviews Foucauldian concepts to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions in the areas of Aboriginal education, history, policy and curriculum and related discourses. I argue that Australian history and the legacy of colonialism contributes to and impacts significantly on education and influences education systems today, including the discourse that continues to position Aboriginal children as inferior to other students. The review of this research and writing is organised into five organising themes. This chapter commences with an overview of the historical impact of colonisation on the education of Aboriginal children (2.2). The second discusses the data as a discourse that maintain ‘gaps’ in knowledge (2.3). The third focuses on Foucault’s regime of truths as applicable to Aboriginal early childhood education (2.4). The last sections review the literature directed at the construct of cultural competence.

### ***2.2 A history of the development of the deficit discourse***

Researchers highlight the educational ‘disadvantage’ that is often associated with Aboriginal education. This ‘disadvantage’ is an outcome of historical policies and practices. Australia is marked with a long history of policies that were designed with the intent to erase the existence of all Aboriginal peoples and later to assimilate Aboriginal people into the mainstream to eradicate Aboriginal cultural knowledge, practices and values all together (Beresford 2012). Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal people all over Australia maintained complex social, political and cultural kinships systems that incorporated a diversity of customary laws, lore and learning that was underpinned by their Dreaming, kinship systems, and connection to land (Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 11). Education centred on the land and involved children learning alongside adults, learning

was viewed as a natural holistic process. Price (2012, p. 4) contends that ‘right from the beginning there was a specialized education and for each child there was a teacher, a mentor and a peer with whom to learn ... who ensured that history and the essentials of life were taught’. Aboriginal society was based on an egalitarian system that was holistic and emphasised belonging, spirituality and relatedness (Martin 2005). Even though this was a complex education system, Aboriginal children were viewed as backward by non-Indigenous society. Such a view further disenfranchised them from fully participating in all areas of society.

The history of Aboriginal education in Australia has been profoundly shaped by exclusion and disadvantage (Price 2012; Partington 1998). It has become common practice to peruse reports on Aboriginal education and to focus on what the Aboriginal child cannot do and on ‘Indigenous disadvantage’. Additionally, there has been reports and research that conclude that this disadvantage results in part from federal and state history of legislation (Purdie, Dudgeon & Walker 2010; de Plevitz 2007). This history is marked by three distinct periods as described by Partington (1998) and can be categorised as the Mission period, leading to more restricted regulations in the 1880s into the Protection era, and from the late 1930s the Assimilation period. Throughout these periods policies of exclusion, separation, segregation and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children were implemented with the intent of civilising them to fit into the white society (Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 12). Aboriginal children were deemed uneducable and were only expected to attain a level of education comparable to a 10-year-old (Price 2012). This was based on various Eurocentric representations of Aboriginal peoples as a ‘child-like race ... [that] occupy a low position in the scale of humanity’ (Edwards 2005, pp. 123 - 124). Therefore, education was provided with the main emphasis being on civilising Aboriginal people, ‘to teach them Christianity and the Western way of life and to rescue them from their heathen ways’ (Partington 1998, p. 33). Racialized discourses surrounding Aboriginal children positioned them as lower than the Western norm and were commonly described as ‘heathen’, ‘uneducable’, ‘primitive’ and ‘doomed’ (Price 2012).

As noted previously, Aboriginal peoples were subjected to various acts and policies that aimed to ‘protect’, ‘exclude’ and ‘control’. For example, the provisions of the *Aborigines Act 1911 (SA)* which was the predecessor of the earlier, *Aboriginal Orphans Ordinance 1844 Act* was designed to segregate and separate Aboriginal people from the general population. Reserves and Missions were set up to ensure that Aboriginal freedom and movement was subjected to constant surveillance. The *Aborigines Act 1911 (SA)* also gave

the Chief Protector legal guardianship of all Aboriginal children. Section 10 of the Act essentially made the Chief Protector the legal guardian of all Aboriginal and ‘half-caste’ children until they were 18 years of age. This Act had devastating effects on successive generations of Aboriginal families as Aboriginal children were removed from their families (Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2012).

Representations of Aboriginal people in the past have involved overgeneralizations based on dominant narratives about their culture and ways of being. The thinking at that time was based on a British system of classifying people underpinned by nineteenth-century Social Darwinist theories. Influential thinkers of the time such as Herbert Spencer drew on Charles Darwin’s publication *The Origin of Species* (1859), and argued that different species evolved through ‘natural selection’ or ‘survival of the fittest’ (Wilkie 1997, p. 3). This theory regarded the superiority of the white ‘race’ and demise of the ‘black race’ as normal (Edwards 2005, p. 123). The discourse at the time found it ‘scientifically proven’ that ‘inferior’ peoples were destined to become extinct and was a predetermined outcome based on Spencer’s adaptation of Charles Darwin’s theory. The following quote by South Australian journalist JD Woods in 1879 highlights the predominant thinking in that period towards Aboriginal peoples. It was thought that:

without a history, they have no past; without a religion they have no hope; without the habits of forethought and providence they have no future. Their doom is sealed and all that the civilized man [*sic*] can do ... is to take care that the closing hour shall not be hurried on by want, caused by culpable neglect on his part. (Woods 1879, p. 38)

At this time, Christianity was considered to be the standard religion; those cultures that did not practice Christianity were deemed ignorant and inferior. This is evident in the following quote, printed in a news article ‘The education and civilization of aborigines’ [*sic*], published by *The Adelaide Observer* in 1879:

It is the common belief that the aborigines [*sic*] of South Australia are incapable of civilization, that they are unteachable, and as a race are so incorrigibly idle by nature as to render it impossible to train them into habits of industry. (Observer 1879, p. 10f)

The Aboriginal Protection Board was established in 1883 to ‘protect’ Aboriginal people, basically controlling every aspect of their daily lives. During this time, Aboriginal people were segregated on established missions and reserves. Based on theories of Social Darwinism, it was assumed that Aboriginal people were uneducable. In the 1930s, anthropologist AP Elkin asserted these ideas:

The recent policy is to educate aborigines [*sic*] (mostly mixed-bloods) up to what might be called a 'useful labourer's standard', for to do more, if it were possible, would not help them. Aborigines (full and mixed blood) should not, and cannot, be assimilated by the white community. They must live apart. They cannot become equals of the white race. (Elkin in Gray & Beresford 2008, p. 205)

Elkin demonstrated the popular belief pertaining to the alleged un-educability of Aboriginal people because of their 'race' (Price 2012). Aboriginal children suffered under several discriminatory government policies that separated, segregated, excluded, 'protected' and removed them from their families and communities (Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 12). On the missions and reserves, Aboriginal children were required to attend the schools that were managed by the Aborigines Protection Board and administered by the missionaries (Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 13). Aboriginal children were considered inferior and taught accordingly with intent to eliminate the 'primitive', 'heathen' and 'savage' (Beresford 2012; Price 2012; Partington 1988).

The Aborigines Act 1911 (SA) also enabled government authorities to enact strict control over the mobility of Aboriginal peoples. To maintain order, Western society relied heavily on disciplining technologies. Discipline in a Foucauldian sense was the main interest of the many policies enacted to control the Aboriginal population. As Foucault (2001, p. 219) argued: 'Discipline was never more important or more valorized than at the moment when it became important to manage a population'.

Drawing on Foucault's position on governmentality, the establishment of reserves, missions and schools were all institutions in which discipline was enforced. The policies that forced Aboriginal peoples onto reserves and mission was an act of what Foucault refers to as governmentality. This demonstrates how power is practiced through governmentality. Moreover, power works through government to support disciplining mechanisms, such as the role and functions of the Chief Protectors that forced a population to abide by the dominant ways, in this case, Western ways of living, being and knowing. Such powers were expressed and applied 'through permanent mechanisms of surveillance and control' (Foucault 2003, p. 37). The operation of a normalising disciplinary power involved a 'judging' of some sort. Foucault (1979 p. 304) argued that 'the judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge'. These 'judges of normality' can be argued to be prevalent in contemporary Aboriginal policies and in all areas of life for Aboriginal people from the health system to the education system. This idea will be discussed further in a later section.

The most destructive government policy granted power to authorities to remove Aboriginal children from their families. This in effect was an 'act of cultural genocide' (Malin & Maidment 2003, p. 86). This had disastrous effects that contributed to the long-lasting effects inflicted upon generations of Aboriginal families today. Curthoys (cited in Carter 2006, p. 80) urges us to consider the act of genocide as:

the attempt to eliminate some people's sense of being a people, a distinct human group. That is why the question of the removal of children is so important ... for it is clearly not about killing, but about the attempt to eradicate any sense of 'peoplehood', of national or ethnic or group identity.

Aboriginal children continued to be removed from their families throughout the 1930s and at times faced extreme exclusion from all areas of society, including from attending school (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). In 1948, a survey was conducted by FEA Bateman who argued that two main issues impacted on Aboriginal education – 1: 'the native [*sic*] family life and our own standards are as wide apart as the poles and are completely and irrevocably incompatible' and 2: 'they must be changed from a nomadic, idle and discontented race to a settled, industrious, contented section of the community' (Bateman 1948, p. 26). The post-war period of the late 1940s saw a significant shift in Aboriginal education policy when Australia became a signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, committing the nation to Article 26:

Everyone has the right to education; (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. (United Nations 1989a)

This marked the beginning of a period where Assimilation was rendered more 'appropriate' for Aboriginal people. Malin and Maidment (2003) argue that assimilation was based on a racial premise that Aboriginal people would give up their cultural identities, values and beliefs and adopt the values and beliefs of Western society. Carter (2006 p.79) also notes that 'half-caste' children were to be separated from their families and sent to institutions for training. This was the beginning of the policy of assimilation where 'half-castes' were assimilated into the general population. Assimilation was defined at the 1961 Native Welfare Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers in Canberra:

The policy of assimilation means in the view of all Australian governments that all aborigines [*sic*] and part-aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs,

hopes and loyalties as other Australians. (The Native Welfare Conference 1961, p. 1, cited in Reynolds 1972, p. 175)

Horton (1994, p. 68) affirms that assimilation is the ‘process by which a dominant cultural group absorbs a suppressed group into its society with the ultimate effect of destroying the subjugated society’. To be assimilated into the general population, Aboriginal peoples had to deny their cultural heritage, their languages, their values and beliefs. The State Government would then issue an Aboriginal person a certificate that specifically stated that they were no longer considered as Aboriginal but rather a person that had achieved a status acceptable to Western society. This unfortunately created all sorts of identity issues for many Aboriginal peoples for generations to come.

There were significant changes during the 1970s with Aboriginal peoples lobbying for change and challenging racial discrimination in all its structural forms (Whatman & Duncan 2005). Assimilation and integration policies were replaced by a policy of self-determination. Many Aboriginal scholars including Charles Perkins and Gary Foley were pivotal in their roles in challenging racism in Australia. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs at the time, Senator Cavanagh, aimed to ‘remove the disadvantages generally faced by Aboriginal Australians ... and to make it possible for Aboriginal communities and individuals to develop as they wish within the overall Australian society’ (Gardiner-Garden 1992, p. 15). The government legislated for Aboriginal communities and organisations to self-manage. This led to the development of the first Aboriginal Consultative Group in 1975, and later to the establishment of the National Aboriginal Education Committee in 1980. Nevertheless, the curriculum continued to be biased and portrayed Aboriginal peoples in a negative light; Aboriginal children were taught at school to deny and reject their cultural identity and heritage. Education continues to be the primary vehicle in which to assimilate and integrate Aboriginal peoples into Western society.

A National Task Force was established in 1988 to develop a consistent policy approach to Aboriginal education (De Plevitz 2007). This task force developed the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (1989) and identified four major themes:

- (1) involvement of Indigenous peoples in educational decision-making;
- (2) equality of access to educational services;
- (3) equality of educational participation, commensurate with all Australians; and
- (4) equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

(Department of Employment, Education and Training 1993)

Counter to this, fifteen years later Partington (2005) argues that formal education systems are still failing Aboriginal students. Partington (2005, p.4) maintains that:

despite the statements of politicians and public officials ... the situation remains largely unchanged from one decade to the next. Education is typical of the slowness to change. Progress has been limited and the problems experienced by Indigenous students in schools today are similar to those experienced a generation ago. (Partington 2005, p. 4)

Partington (2005) argues that very little has changed over time. In 1969, representations of Aboriginal peoples were still influenced by scientific views of the ‘noble savage’. A paper published in 1969 titled, ‘*The education of semi-primitive detribalised Aborigines*’ characterised Aboriginal people as ‘depressed, frustrated and hopeless peoples ... [participating in] drunkenness, gambling, immorality, etc. with the lowest of living standards in all spheres’ (Warren 1969, p. 76). This type of discourse contributed to the education system assuming that the ‘problems of their Aboriginal students .... [were due to their] home backgrounds and general living environment’ (Beresford 2003, pp. 57–58). A review of the literature consistently highlights the cultural deficiency of Aboriginal children in education. This has invariably created an educational discourse that reinvents itself and which contributes to a continuing discourse of deficit. Beresford (2003, p. 27) explains a deficit perspective as one that:

has its foundation in a conservative world view that Aboriginal people lack the cognitive capacity or environmental stimulation to succeed at school. Although discredited for several decades among informed educationalists, the view persists among some conservative teachers who continue to believe that a lack of adequate preparation for schooling in the home, poor language and literacy skill, and problems of attendance, health and nutrition explain the failure of many Aboriginal children to thrive in school. (Beresford 2003, p.27)

Throughout the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, educational institutions provided at the very least, access for Aboriginal students. However, these institutions were operating from a deficit perspective – not in the best interests of Aboriginal students. I contend that these perspectives are still manifested in many current Aboriginal education policies, data-gathering techniques and tools. This will be discussed further in a later section (see section 2.3). Clearly, racism continues in schools and we shouldn’t be cushioning the ‘truth’. There is a long history of ‘exclusion, deprivation, stigma and racism’ (Lucas & Beresford 2010, p. 38). It needs to be clear that a ‘multiplicity of approaches and policies to improve education of Indigenous young people’ (Beresford & Gray 2012, p. 120) began with early attempts to ‘civilise’. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a detailed discussion of the various acts and policies that controlled every aspect of Aboriginal life. The point is

that although there appear to have been some minor improvements in the field of Aboriginal Education over the last few decades, there remains remnants of Australia's racist past evident in the large disproportionate gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students today. This is discussed further in the following section (2.3).

More recently, there has been a shift in research about Aboriginal education to learn more about the characteristics of Aboriginal student achievement and the factors that contribute to improved educational outcomes. Gray and Partington (2003) explore several factors and reasons as to why Aboriginal students fail to attend school regularly. They argue that school-based factors including the school environment, relationships between students and low expectations from teachers can lead to the non-attendance of Aboriginal students. Absent from this discourse is dialogue around how education systems 'appeared resistant to the self-reflection or critique required to support meaningful change in educational practices or policies' (Vass 2012, p.88). Writers such as Gollan and Malin (2012, p. 172) affirm '[i]t is time for teachers to evaluate the appropriateness of their teaching programs rather than looking for the deficits in the Aboriginal children or their family'. Turning the gaze upon teachers, Partington (2005, p. 113) argues that 'the importance of the teacher is the foremost facet of any critique of Aboriginal education'. Similarly, Hattie (2003, p.2) affirms that:

it is what teachers know [knowledge], do [skills] and care about [attitudes] in this learning equation ... the answer lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act ... the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with students during 15,000 hours of schooling. (Hattie 2003, p.2)

This is not to point the finger and place blame towards the teachers as this is counterproductive to working towards the goal of social justice. It is pointless to position teachers as 'deficit' and to blame. Levin (2006, p. 406) notes that:

The point is not to blame teachers which would be incorrect, morally indefensible, and ineffective. The school improvement literature rightly takes the view that teachers should be treated with respect as partners in the process. But is this same not true of students and parents? How do we combine respect for educators with the required sense of urgency that the situation be corrected? (Levin 2006, p. 406)

Levin (2006) argues that sustained improvement in students' outcomes should focus on change strategies at a systemic level. This has been demonstrated in part during the last decades of the twentieth century where there has been changes in government and educational policies in Australia, moving from clear assimilationist policies to notions of culturally responsive teaching. Some would argue that a change in labels and terms does

little to hide the fact that there is an underlying assimilatory goal at play. I argue that understanding the historical contexts of invasion and racism is an essential element to set the context for this thesis. There is a need to ‘expose structural inequalities and assimilatory processes and work towards debunking and deconstructing them’ (Brayboy 2005, p. 440). Having discussed the history of a colonised discourse of power, I now discuss the contemporary educational terrain beginning with data as discourse contributing to notions of deficit.

### ***2.3 Data as representing and maintaining ‘gaps’***

The previous section demonstrated that education policies and curriculum frameworks have since early colonial time positioned Aboriginal students within a discourse of deficit and as behind or below their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Gorski (2010, p. 6) maintains that the function of deficit ideology is to deflect attention from the systemic conditions and socio-political context that underlie or exacerbate inequities. The power of language is significant and plays a substantial role in maintaining a deficit ideology towards the perceived ‘failure’ of Aboriginal children. This is evident in discourse around data, for example in assessment and reporting, where Aboriginal students’ attendance rates are compared to non-Aboriginal students’. Reports from The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Reports* were used to highlight this important data. Other reports such as the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health performance framework report*; Australian Bureau of Statistics reports (ABS); and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social survey* (NATSISS) are important sources of data, but it was preferable to use minimal reports as there is potential duplication of information among them.

Non-attendance of Aboriginal students has been a focus of education research and policy development since the mid-1980s (Gray & Beresford 2002). Data pertaining to the attendance rates of Aboriginal students are always compared to non-Aboriginal students. This comparison begins as early as preschool as national and state figures highlight that Aboriginal children are not accessing early childhood programs to the extent they could be. This could be due to several reasons and will be discussed later in the review. Nonetheless, participation in early childhood programs is important. The OECD (2004) highlights that children who attended preschool for more than one year showed a statistically significant performance gain in later school achievement compared to those who did not attend preschool (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004). It has been

ascertained the importance of children attending early childhood programs to contribute to improved learning outcomes. Unfortunately, for various reasons the attendance rates of Aboriginal children in early childhood programs across Australia is low. This is concerning and the need to address access for Aboriginal children is vital as ‘access to good quality early childhood education is likely to be one of the most effective ways to reduce social inequity’ (Biddle 2011, p. 24).

According to the data provided by the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report (2016) in 2015, 87.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the year before school were enrolled in preschool and 79.8 per cent were attending. This compares to 96.8 per cent enrolment and 93.0 per cent attendance for non-Aboriginal children (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2016, p. 77). The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report 2016 affirms that the attendance of Aboriginal children in preschools is low. Therefore, Aboriginal children are missing the best opportunity to lay the foundations in literacy, numeracy, social and emotional development (Harrison, Goldfield, Metcalfe & Moore 2012).

Most early childhood research tends to focus on identifying and describing ‘gaps’, which has resulted in a discourse of deficit about Aboriginal children (Bowes & Grace 2014, p. 2). This is also evident in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). The AEDC provides a national measurement to monitor Australian children’s development and is assessed by their teachers in their initial year of formal schooling. The AEDC as a population measure of young children's development in their first year of school is conducted every 3 years. The AEDC measures five key areas, or domains, of early childhood development: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills (school-based); and, communication skills and general knowledge. These areas are evidently linked to the predictors of good adult health, education and social outcomes (Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research 2009). The 2015 AEDC data highlights that the proportion of Aboriginal children who were developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the five AEDC measures was 42.1 per cent (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, p. 32). Aboriginal children are perceived as twice as likely to be considered developmentally vulnerable in Western standards. This discourse of vulnerability positions Aboriginal students as inferior compared to a normalised standard, all which contributes to discourse of deficit which fosters not only Aboriginal students holding negative perceptions of themselves but also of educators contributing to a discourse of low expectations. This type of ‘discourse-stacking’

(Delpit 1993, p. 294) is evident in other aspects of education including measurements of performance, which is detrimental to Aboriginal students.

Standardised tests such as the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)<sup>7</sup> also contribute to this discourse. The collection of and analysis of NAPLAN data has contributed to the problematic rhetoric of ‘closing the gap’, ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘poor outcomes’ concerning Aboriginal students (Guenther 2013). The ‘gap’ is framed in terms of what Aboriginal students cannot do, in comparison to what non-Aboriginal students can do. The colonialist education system uses tools such as NAPLAN to promote ‘western ontologies and epistemologies’ (Guenther 2013, p. 159) and conveniently disregard the need to develop culturally appropriate assessment tools. Too much focus on the supposed deficits of the Aboriginal learner distracts attention from the role of the school, systems, policies and pedagogy. In my review of the literature, I was drawn to the reflections of a non-Aboriginal educator in Webster and Ryan’s *Understanding Curriculum* (2014) who questioned the use of NAPLAN in a remote Australian school with a high number of Aboriginal students. Webster and Ryan (2014) provide a critical introduction to contemporary curriculum including theory and practice. Drawing on a range of perspectives, they encourage the reader to reconceptualise curriculum by asking questions such as: ‘What sort of society are we working towards, and how is this reflected in the classroom?’ Webster and Ryan’s (2014, pp. 132–149) review of ‘Indigenous Education’ invites readers to engage with some of the thoughts of a young non-Aboriginal teacher whose interest is ‘in the kinds of spaces Indigenous students inhabit in a western school culture’ (Webster & Ryan 2014, p. viii). This is illustrated in one of the teacher’s journal entries, which encapsulates my thoughts about standardised testing for Aboriginal students:

On May 2012, I had my first experience of the collision of values that is NAPLAN. The effect on the students was visible. Attendance numbers dropped throughout the week and morale hit a low. Teachers supervised rooms full of confused students, unable to read the page in front of them and even less equipped to answer in the manner expected. I had to participate in inflicting NAPLAN on my kids. It was awful. It is entirely senseless and cruel to take kids that are at their own rate of ‘progress’, learning in a language that is not their own, and then force them to sit for a test written for kids who have grown up privileged in that language. We set them up for failure and entirely kick the confidence we’ve worked so hard to build, and for what? (Gannaway cited in Webster & Ryan 2014, p. 140)

This narrative clearly confirms that NAPLAN normalises success associated with whiteness (Guenther 2013, p. 159). It is data about Aboriginal peoples that is ‘routinely paired with comparative data from the non-Indigenous population ... to demonstrate how

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<sup>7</sup> NAPLAN, the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy, is a standardised literacy and numeracy test conducted annually across Australia for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

far the Indigenous population deviates from the norm' (Walter & Anderson 2013, p. 77). Klenowski and Gertz (2009) call for 'culture-fair assessment' that draws on Aboriginal students' 'funds of knowledge'. They further suggest that assessment be designed to eliminate the privileging of particular groups over others (Klenowski & Gertz 2009, p. 36). It is obvious that Aboriginal education policies that focus on the need for 'culturally inclusive' curriculum, teaching methodologies and assessment approaches appear to be rhetoric with very little action taken to address structural issues of power, knowledge and discourse that contribute to hegemonic control (Webster 2014, p. 133). These types of acts maintain the status quo and continue the deficit gaze upon Aboriginal students. Prominent Aboriginal scholar Lester-Irabbina Rigney (2002) states that:

The status quo is no longer acceptable. Nor is the spectacle of Indigenous failure. No longer is it justified for the magnifying glass in the sun to be focused on the so-called 'Aboriginal deficit'. Rather, robust analysis and critique of educational systems, structures, and jurisdiction must be interrogated for their role in inequality (Rigney, L 2002).

Rigney (2002) advocates for the critique of the education system. To add weight to this argument, I contend that a critique of racialized discourse and practices, how they are produced, reproduced and maintained within education institutions is critical. There also needs to be an affirming space for presenting a counter-discourse that refutes historical and contemporary ideological constructions of 'truth' and 'reality'. Mac Naughton (2005, p. 147) succinctly explains Foucault's belief that the past and present are 'intimately and politically connected; and that these connections produce contested and overlapping ways of thinking and being in our world'. Thus, there are intersecting discourses and sometimes contradictory 'truths' that work to maintain the status quo. The data and 'gap' talk continually positions Aboriginal students and children as statistical units of deficit. Aboriginal children have been monitored and under surveillance since colonisation. Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Dodson (1994, p. 2) affirms that:

Since their first intrusive gaze, colonising cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling "aborigines" and Aboriginality. Under that gaze, Aboriginality changed from being a daily practice to being "a problem to be solved". (Dodson 1994, p.2)

Essentially Dodson (1994) argues that power exists in schools in terms of surveillance and in the form of normalised judgements about Aboriginal students. Drawing on Foucault's notion of normalisation, Ball (1990, p. 2) argues that normalised judgements mean 'the establishment of measurements, hierarchy and regulations around the idea of a

distributionary statistical norm within a given population – the idea of judgement based on what is normal and thus what is abnormal’. This is evident in standardised testing as noted previously with NAPLAN data collection. The literature points to normalised judgements that lead to dividing practices further positioning Aboriginal students as ‘lacking’. The discourse of positioning Aboriginal students as statistical units of deficit is as productive today as it was upon colonisation. To take a case in point, I recall an instance where an off-hand comment was made by a preschool aide about a fair-skinned young girl riding a bike in the yard. The preschool aide said to me, ‘You wouldn’t think Ivy was Aboriginal, would you? She is so light in skin colour and so advanced in her reading skills, she could probably get away with not identifying’. These types of stories are commonsense status quo stories that really do nothing but ‘normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values and standards ... and stunt our imaginations and prevent us from envisioning alternate possibilities’ (Keating 2007, p. 123). This example recreates the status quo of positioning an Aboriginal child as ‘different’ and inferior. Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that discourse positions Aboriginal students as statistical units of deficit and maintains the status quo. The reality is that current policy documents continue to position Aboriginal students as lacking and behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts through ‘gap’ discourse.

Research data plays a significant role in representing and maintaining a discourse of deficit in relation to Aboriginal children. There is much to be considered relative to the role educators play in understanding Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2003). My perception is that the Australian education system through its policies and practices contributes significantly to the discourse of deficit. It has been demonstrated that deficit discourses and practices can often be revealed in ‘seemingly neutral and compassionate ways’ (Castagno 2014, p 35). For instance, in her book *Other people’s children: cultural conflict in the classroom*, international scholar Lisa Delpit (2006) discusses how power imbalances within the United States manifests in classrooms. Through conversation and dialogue with teaching staff, parents and community, Delpit demonstrates that everyday interactions are loaded with assumptions about the capabilities and dispositions of children who are not part of the status quo. Delpit (1993, p. 294) argues that teachers have opportunity in all their interactions with children, including enacted curriculum, to ‘acknowledge the unfair ‘discourse-stacking’ that our society engages in that systematically positions and oppresses “non-whites”’. This is a recurrent and persistent theme that I have encountered as I have worked in the education system. If anything, it is at

its peak now and can be compared to the low expectations of education for Aboriginal students in the nineteenth century where education for Aboriginal students aimed only ‘at the completing of their schooling, to attain the level achieved by a ten year old child’ (Price 2014, p. 4). This oppressive discourse, along with past colonialist attitudes and actions, has contributed to the so-called ‘failure’ of Aboriginal students in the education system.

As noted previously, there have also been many policies and programs that continue to position Aboriginal students within a discourse of deficit and as behind or below their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Biddle, 2010). One such initiative is the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* released by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs in June 2011. Such policies shape our understandings and perpetuate deficit discourse. Carol Bacchi’s (2009) approach in *Analysing policy: what’s the problem represented to be?* affirms that policies influence our understandings. Bacchi (2009) argues that these problems exist because of the way they are represented and conceptualised. By way of an example, deficit discourse is apparent in many policies that position Aboriginal students as ‘a “problem” that needs “fixing”’ (Vass 2012, p. 85). Gap discourse is evident in the following quote contained within the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* released by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA 2010): ‘governments have agreed to take urgent action to close the gap between ... Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander people and other Australians’ (MCEECDYA 2010, p. 3). The action plan was developed to assist education providers to ‘accelerate improvement in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people’ (MCEECDYA 2010, p. 4) through the enactment of 55 actions across six domains:

1. Readiness for schools
2. Engagement and connections
3. Attendance
4. Literacy and numeracy
5. Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development and
6. Pathways to real post school options (MCEECDYA 2010, p. 5).

In the preface to the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014*, it is noted that:

Governments across Australia recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians with one of the oldest continuing cultures in human history. They affirm the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to sustain their languages and cultures. (MCEECDYA 2010, p. 3)

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* (MCEECDYA 2010) endorses ideas of difference, deficit and disadvantage through the rhetoric of 'closing the gap'. Although the document highlights the importance of the provision of culturally appropriate curriculum, pedagogy and practices, it continues to position and privilege Western knowledge and practices. Nakata affirms that:

the (white) experts still name the game, they still identify the problem as lack, and they still provide solutions on our behalf ... this has meant that culturally relevant programs have become add-ons to largely unchanged mainstream practices in the education system. (Nakata cited in Osborne 2001. p. 345)

The purpose of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010-2014* (MCEECDYA 2010) purpose is to enable a coordinated approach across systems to improve Aboriginal education across 'a range of agreed goals' and underline 'the importance of making Aboriginal education the core business of education providers' (MCEECDYA 2010, p. 1). One of the weaknesses of the plan is its attempt to position Aboriginal children as deficit through its normalising approaches to data collection. The plan advocates for the collection of data from standardized tests to assess Aboriginal student achievement. As noted previously, standardized tests are based on colonial values and worldviews that position Aboriginal children as subject and 'other', children who need to catch up to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Such representations serve to exploit an already underrepresented group. Using Foucault's lens of analysis, these plans, policies and practices in effect create a dividing practice through normalization. Dividing practices have come to be a form of language that serves both to include and exclude through claiming to measure what is good and bad, normal and not normal. Aboriginal children are placed within these normalizing systems of classification that assign and measure children and their skills (Dalberg, Moss & Pence 1999, p. 37). Foucault defined normalization as:

the establishment of measurements, hierarchy and regulations around the idea of a distributionary statistical norm within a given population – the idea of judgement based on what is normal and thus what is abnormal. (Foucault, cited in Ball 1990, p. 2)

Foucault's work on governmentality allows us to question educational policies and practices and its unexamined truths. In examining a policy framework such as the *National*

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010-2014* (MCEECDYA 2010), a Foucauldian analysis examines not only the institutions in which it functions but also the knowledge and values underlying the practices. Within these policies are monitoring and outcomes targets that create quantifiable measures to judge, position and continue the regulation of Aboriginal children. The policies are mechanisms to shape actions and to govern, to exercise power and to control behaviour.

The most recent plan related to Aboriginal Education, *The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* (Education Council 2015) builds on past commitments in education policy including the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010–2014* (MCEECDYA 2010). The intent here is to highlight how power, knowledge and discourse are all related and continue to exhibit in policies that focus on what the governing body can do for Aboriginal people. These policies thus continue to position Aboriginal people as inferior. It is apparent that policy and curriculum is constructed within dominant regimes of governmentality that cannot ‘disconnect itself from its social context, from the ideas that underpin its existence’ (Vandenbroeck Coussee, Bradt & Roose 2011 cited in Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw 2015, p. 85). This governmentality concept along with insights into regulatory power as a technology constructs ‘normal’ through policies that requires we collectively conform to the values and perspectives held by the status quo (Cannella & Viruru 2004, p. 48). This leads to questions related to who is excluded and marginalised in the process. Mac Naughton (2009) affirms the importance of responding: ‘to ignore [challenging questions] is to make racism and the whiteness upon which it sits live on in our lives and in the lives of young children’ (Mac Naughton 2009, p. 190).

The next section draws on Foucault (1980) and Mac Naughton (2003, 2005, 2009), two poststructuralist scholars who demonstrate the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse that operate in dominant regimes of governmentality, thus portraying discourses of ‘truth’ in early childhood.

#### ***2.4 Regimes of truth in early childhood education***

Poststructuralist approaches raise questions about how power-knowledge relations are established in the context of different social, political, and cultural contexts (Mac Naughton 2005). The previous section highlighted how data collection tools, constructed within dominant regimes, contribute to discourse about Aboriginal children, which is becoming more and more recognised by scholars as counter-productive. Notable Torres Strait

Islander scholar Martin Nakata importantly claims that ‘unless we begin to understand our position in relation to the shifting discursive regimes that produce that position we will continue to have difficulty articulating the complexity of our position’ (Nakata cited in McConaghy 2000, p. x). To set the scene for this section, let us first turn to discussion about the early years of education as a significant period in a child’s life.

The early years of a child’s life from Birth to eight years are a crucial stage where children undergo substantial physical, cognitive, language and social development. A wide range of literature shows that positive early learning experiences in the early years nurtures children’s holistic development and contributes to successful outcomes later in life (Elliot 2006; McCain & Mustard 1999; Sims 2011). Early childhood education is important in its own right as a time when children inquire, explore and discover the world around them and establish attitudes and dispositions to learning that remain with them throughout their lives (DEEWR 2010; Elliot 2006). This is the time where a child’s lifetime social, emotional and educational outcomes begin and can also potentially lay the foundations for lifelong consequences (Harrison et al. 2012; Sims 2011). The importance of early childhood has been recognised by Australian Commonwealth and state and territory governments in the *Investing in the early years—a national early childhood development strategy* (COAG 2009). The strategy is a response to evidence about the importance of early childhood developments and the benefits of ensuring that ‘all children experience a positive early childhood experience to create a better future for themselves and for the nation’ (COAG 2009, p. 4). A key mechanism for achieving the strategy vision included the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR 2009). The EYLF is Australia’s first national curriculum framework for educators working in early childhood services with children from birth to five years of age. The EYLF consists of three key components – principles, practices and learning outcomes that support and enhance young children’s learning in early childhood education contexts as well as their transition to school (DEEWR 2009; DEEWR 2010). There are five Principles in the EYLF:

1. Relationships – secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships between educator, children and families
2. Partnerships – working in genuine partnership with each family to support the child’s learning and development
3. High expectations and equity – a belief that each child is supported to reach their full potential

4. Respect for diversity – respect for each family’s cultural practices, beliefs and values;
5. Ongoing learning and reflective practices – educators regularly reflect on and review their practices to inform children’s learning and development.

(DEEWR 2009, pp. 12–19)

The EYLF (DEEWR 2009, pp 14-17) also outlines eight practices that relate to how educators put the principles into action. These practices include:

- Holistic approaches
- Responsiveness to children
- Learning through play
- Intentional teaching
- Learning environments
- Cultural competence
- Continuity of learning and transitions and
- Assessment for learning.

Early childhood educators guided by the Early Years Learning Framework are expected to reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (DEEWR 2009, p. 5). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the key international human rights treaty relating to children’s rights, sets out several rights and responsibilities relevant to early childhood education and care (United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child 1989). The EYLF additionally highlights the significant role of children’s rights in the provision of quality teaching and learning in the early years. The EYLF states that:

Early childhood educators will reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention states that all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximises their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages. (DEEWR 2009, p. 5)

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Australia has a commitment to ensure that children’s rights and needs are at the centre of policy development and service delivery. The EYLF, through its principles and practices, can be viewed as a vehicle to address or endorse issues that relate to power, knowledge and deficit discourse of Aboriginal students within early childhood education.

Foucault (1980) proposes that when discourse becomes dominant, it gains a sense of acceptability and status as being 'normal'. Discourses then have 'real' effects, legitimating practices constituting 'truths' about 'reality' (Malson 1998, p. 27). Furthermore, poststructuralism as a theoretical perspective provides opportunities to analyse the ways in which language and systems operate in the dominant culture to assimilate and subjugate Aboriginal children within education. It is through a poststructuralist lens that I attempt to explain 'our' present social position by analysing the discourses that have been produced to situate us. I take the stance that knowledge per se is socially constructed and historically embedded and that we are all active participants in this process (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999). Therefore, there are many 'perspectival realities' (Gergen 1992 in Dahlberg et al. 2007, p. 23) that are socially constructed which tend to be the product of Eurocentric values and which potentially influence the beliefs and ideas of all members of society (Partington 1998). Specific socially constructed dominant discourses within society and the field of education is no exception.

On describing discourse, Mac Naughton (2000) refers to 'the emotional, social and institutional frameworks and practices through which we make meaning in our lives' (Mac Naughton 2000, p. 50). Dominating discourses serve to inhibit the exploration of alternative discourses. For example, education has been focussed on Eurocentric perspectives and ways of knowing, excluding and marginalising Aboriginal perspectives. Purdie and Buckley (2010) note that Aboriginal educational failure is a discourse of deficit where individual, family and cultural factors are to blame for the apparent non-achievement of Aboriginal children in education. As noted previously, this discrepancy in educational outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students has come to be viewed as 'normal' (Mellor & Corrigan 2004). Aboriginal educator, Chris Sarra affirms in the position paper, 'High-expectations relationships: a foundation for quality learning environments in all Australian schools' that the deficit positioning of Aboriginal children is convincingly emphasised in education through the discourse of 'disadvantage' (Stronger Smarter Institute Limited 2014). This was noted in a previous section, that data acts as a vehicle in maintaining and perpetuating disadvantage through deficit discourse which operates to perpetuate negative outcomes for Aboriginal students. This has consequences in all areas of education, including influencing educators' perspectives of Aboriginal children and education. By way of an example, a study conducted by Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolpenuk & Robinson (2012, p. 144) found that several non-Aboriginal teachers:

harboured to varying degrees a “deficit” understanding of why there continued to be poor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes. Furthermore, these understandings were rationalised through a racialised “othering” process that placed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students beyond “white” norms.

Gorski (2010, p. 6) maintains that the function of deficit ideology is to deflect attention from the systemic conditions and socio-political context that underlie or exacerbate inequities. The power of language is significant and plays a role in maintaining a deficit ideology towards the perceived ‘failure’ of Aboriginal children. Weedon (1997, p. 97) also contends that language is the primary place where subjectivity is constructed. The acquisition of language makes ascribing meaning to our experiences possible. However, the ways in which we think are determined by the discourses available to us. Weedon (1997, p. 108) describes discourse as:

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge’s and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. (Weedon 1997, p. 108)

Just as knowledge is multifaceted, so too are discourses. Individuals embrace different positions at different moments. Weedon (1997, p. 97) argues that discourses compete for the attention of individuals and it is only through individual agency that we are motivated to either reproduce or transform social practices. This is substantiated by Davies (1989, p. xi) who claims that:

individuals, through learning the discursive practices of a society, are able to position themselves within those practices in multiple ways, and to develop subjectivities both in concert with and in opposition to the ways in which others choose to position them.

Then, it is fair to assume that the social world is created and sustained through discourses and discursive practices that act as a medium between the individual and the social world. Through discursive practices we reflect our attitudes, dispositions and perceptions on the subject matter at hand. Foucault (1980) argues that the relationship between knowledge, power and discourses is significant in that dominant discourses have a significant effect on shaping specific practices. Potter and Wetherall (1991, p. 3 cited in Malson 1998, p. 39) conclude that ‘people perform actions of different kinds through their talk and their writing’. Power is developed and managed through discourses, legitimising certain knowledges as ‘regimes of truth’ (Mac Naughton 2005). These ‘regimes of truth’ create an authoritative consensus about what needs to be done in that field and how it should be done. Walkerdine (1994, p. 154) reiterates this point when he states that ‘particular regimes of truth, bodies of knowledge, make possible both what can be said and what can be done’.

Foucault (1980) draws our attention to how knowledge works through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to normalize actions and practices. Foucault (1980) focussed on the association between knowledge and power and how power functioned within what he called an 'institutional apparatus'. The education system is an institutional apparatus that controls and excludes in several ways through practice, statements, actions, and choices. For example, Foucault's work draws our attention to regimes of truth such as 'quality care' that 'sometimes work against social justice by excluding, rather than including, different ways of understanding and living in the world' (Campbell & Page 2003, p. 290). This raises a question as to who has the right to judge what is considered 'quality' in early childhood education (Blaise & Ryan 2012, p. 85). 'Quality' is a Western construct based on Western values while negating other perspectives and values. Using a poststructuralist lens, one could explore the effects of positioning 'others' and challenge the ways in which they produce binary discourses and reproduce meanings that constrain possibilities.

Cohen (2008) uses a Foucauldian lens to analyse the numerous discourses in the universal 'Developmental Appropriate Practice' document. The 'Developmental Appropriate Practice' document is a nationally and internationally recognised document endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC developed this framework as a structure and set of principles and guidelines for best practice in the care and education of young children, birth to age eight. Considering Foucault's (1980) 'regimes of truth', 'discourse/power/knowledge' nexus and 'institutional apparatus', Cohen (2008) insists that the universal 'Developmental Appropriate Practice' document as 'truth' has been woven together by the 'regime' (NAEYC) to regulate what is held to be normal and appropriate for all children and governs early years educator's practices. This 'truth' (DAP) fails to consider Aboriginal views of childhood development and the effects this discourse and practice has on the development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children. This in effect demonstrates how Western models of child development neglect to consider Aboriginal worldviews on child development (Martin 2008).

An understanding of how dominant discourses operate as 'regimes of truths' allows for a greater understanding of how everyday discourses and practices in education systematically disadvantage certain groups (Cohen 2008; Bradbury 2013). Mac Naughton, (2005) affirms that early childhood pedagogies influenced by discourses constitute a 'regime of truth' that currently reproduce and support inequalities. Discourse has real perceived power that affects those who it has been designed for. By way of an example,

take the emergence of the discourse that led to the establishment of the ‘closing the gap’ regime as a measure to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children. This did little but reinforce the image of the ‘disadvantaged child’ to appear. This real effect is an example of how power is implemented through discourse. Foucault (1980, p. 93) states that:

There are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourse.

Blaise and Ryan (2012, p. 83) claim that the discipline of early childhood is compounded with power relations and knowledge production that is continuously being (re)constructed (Blaise & Ryan 2012, p. 83). These ‘truths’ are enshrined in the Early Years Learning Framework and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plans. Through these institutional apparatuses, educators are presented with dominant discourses which frame ‘truths’ about young children and adapt their pedagogy accordingly. At times this positions Aboriginal children and students as deficit. The EYLF focusses on cultural competence as a separate chapter. One could take this as an approach intended to highlight Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing and as a way to enact transformative practices (Martin, 2003). But it also creates a false dichotomy of them and us, a binary of ‘Western’ and ‘Aboriginal’ that emphasises ‘cultural differences’ at the expense of Aboriginal cultures as compared to Western ways.

It has been presented thus far that Aboriginal students are continually constituted as inferior subjects through a range of practices within the education system. Foucault’s (1980) notion of governmentality critiques the ways in which government policies and curriculum frameworks have been applied to regulate the behaviours of educators and children and how the systems operate to sustain a wider political agenda. Government policies, discourses of helping the disadvantaged Aboriginal child and the reinvention of curriculum frameworks and standards-based education diverts attention away from the real issues. The issue is one of manipulation and continued marginalisation. The rhetoric of ‘relationships based’ education and ‘helping’ Aboriginal students achieve to ‘close the gap’ in academic achievement with their non-Aboriginal counterparts positions Aboriginal students as dependant and as the ‘other’ and serves to problematise further in deficit terms inequitable conditions (Cherubini 2011). This manipulation enforces acts and practices of exclusion in what Foucault terms ‘dividing practices’. Dividing practices serves to include and exclude through claiming to measure what is good and bad, normal and not normal. The Aboriginal child is positioned within normalizing systems of classification that assign

and measure their skills (Dalberg, Moss & Pence 1999). These practices are remnants of historical practices that positioned Aboriginal children as deficient and ‘uneducable’ (Price 2012) and inform what is classed as knowledge and ‘truth’ in terms of education. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) explains knowledge as:

Knowledge not only shapes our understanding of the world by offering descriptions that we understand to be true. It also provides techniques of normalization, such as surveillance, measurement, categorization, regulation and evaluation. (Dalberg, Moss & Pence 2007, p, 31)

Clearly, historical and contemporary discourses of paternalism, exclusion and control have discursively formed Aboriginal peoples. It is timely that data and standardised testing is seen for what it is; a means to maintain the status quo and to justify segregationist practices that position Aboriginal students as inferior. We need to return our gaze to what we can do to improve education experiences of Aboriginal children. This means disrupting normalized narratives and discourse that perpetuates difference.

To this end, there has been a major national and international focus on improving the quality of teaching. Quality teaching has been defined in the literature through its impact on student outcomes and through the presence of educators’ qualifications, skills and knowledge (Hattie 2003; Price & Hughes 2009; Masters 2003). However, as noted by Price and Hughes (2009, p. 15), which ‘aspects of quality teaching have the largest impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ educational outcomes remains to be determined’. While Hattie’s (2003) research provides an adequate starting point, they note that it was based on non-Aboriginal samples so cannot be claimed to be appropriate for Aboriginal students. Another key factor identified in the literature around Aboriginal students’ attendance is the quality of teaching. Hattie’s (2003) research posits that the quality of teaching is the most important variable in predicting student achievement.

A review of the publications about the non-attendance of Aboriginal children at a preschool level also points towards the notion of ‘quality’ (Biddle 2011; Purdie & Buckley 2010; Bowes, Kitson & Burns 2010). Although wide research has been undertaken on quality in education, the term ‘quality’ is a value-laden concept; and is an ambiguous and complex term (Zammit 2007, p. 13). Definitions of quality may differ between individual, cultures and context and this is subject to change over time. Therefore, discrepancies in the meaning and composition of quality raise questions as to whether it can be defined and assessed. Broberg, Hwang, Melhuish and Moss (1991, p. 117) take this further by asserting that quality is a ‘slippery and multifaceted construct that requires careful measurement and

interpretation’. Take the following quote from the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010–2014*:

Participation in culturally inclusive, high quality early childhood education programs and care can assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children get the best start in life. (MCEECDYA 2010, p. 9)

There is a presumption that the concept of quality and all it entails in relation to education and early childhood is measurable and consistent. The concept of quality is assumed to be ‘objective, real, knowable’ (Dalberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, p. 4). The concept of ‘cultural inclusion’ raises questions as to what ‘quality’ means for Aboriginal students and whose ‘truth’ is being advocated.

A critical review of research and writing on Aboriginal education has been undertaken with the aim of identifying those pedagogical practices that are indicators of quality in teaching Aboriginal children. It is important to note that these indicators are drawn from a broad range of research and are not representative of what works for all Aboriginal students, nor a final measure of quality. As noted previously, there are differing views in the literature about what constitutes quality in education in Australia and it is taken for granted that ‘there is something – objective, real, [and] knowable – called quality’ (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999, p. 4).

Some researchers emphasise the significant role that teacher’s play in educational success for Aboriginal students and that the quality of early childhood education programs can influence attendance and outcomes for children (Hattie 2003; Burgess & Berwick 2009; Sims 2011). Furthermore, it is also noted that the provision of culturally appropriate programs is an important influence on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s attendance at preschool (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2014, p. 172). It has been reported in the literature that Aboriginal students, families, community members and many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working in schools singled out the work of teachers as the ‘make or break element’ contributing to Aboriginal student success (Burgess & Berwick 2009, p. 1). Moreover, Sarra (cited in Buckskin et al. 2009, p. 10) identifies ‘the relationship between the teacher and the student as the most important place in any education jurisdiction’. Further to this, Buckskin et al. (2009, p. 13) identified that teachers need to have ‘a good understanding of the child as an individual including the cultural context in which the child has been raised’.

Several factors have been identified by various writers that are deemed important to the success of Aboriginal students (Lloyd, Lewthwaite, Osborne & Boon 2015, Milgate &

Giles-Brown 2013; Zammit 2007; Rahman 2010; Purdie & Buckley 2010). These factors are identified as:

- Teachers nurturing the cultural identity of students
- Teachers having High expectations of Aboriginal students
- A welcoming and stimulating environment for children, families and communities
- Authentic and culturally appropriate assessment
- Recognition and acceptance of Aboriginal English
- Culturally appropriate curriculum content
- Respectful relationships between Aboriginal learners and their teachers
- Awareness and cultural competence of educators
- Presence of Aboriginal staff in education settings

Munns, O'Rourke and Bodkin-Andrews (2013) further build on this list through research that further investigates the conditions of success for Aboriginal students. Their study identifies eight common themes that are considered key indicators that contribute to successful outcomes for Aboriginal students. These themes are:

- Strong community relationships
- Provision of Aboriginal cultural spaces
- Involvement of Aboriginal people in curriculum design
- Aboriginal perspectives embedded in curriculum
- Quality teaching from an Aboriginal perspective
- Wellbeing contributing to learning
- Targeted support for Aboriginal students
- The relationships between teachers and students.

(Munns et al. 2013)

The key indicators for success noted by Lloyd, Lewthwaite, Osborne & Boon (2015), Milgate and Giles-Brown (2013), Milgate and Giles-Brown (2013), Zammit (2007), Rahman (2010), Purdie and Buckley (2010) and Munns, O'Rourke and Bodkin-Andrews (2013) are the qualities that would be exhibited by a 'culturally competent' educator. Several writers have identified the need for educators to be 'culturally competent', that is, for educators to have the knowledge and skills to interact appropriately and support Aboriginal students effectively (Goodwin 2012; Milgate & Giles-Brown 2013; Secretariat

of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) 2013). It is thought that if educators were more culturally competent, they would be more likely to create environments supportive of Aboriginal students (Goodwin 2012; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) 2013). The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) identifies cultural competence as a significant pedagogical practice that has been highlighted as vital to the participation of Aboriginal children in early childhood services. Several studies have been conducted that allude to the importance of cultural competence as underpinning effective early childhood programs. This section will highlight some of the research that contributes to this discourse.

### ***2.5 Reproduction of whiteness in education***

Research led by Mac Naughton and Davis (2001, p. 84) set out to ascertain how early childhood educators portrayed Aboriginal people within the curriculum, what resources they used in this work and their ideas on the relevance of teaching young children about Aboriginal culture. Their study also set out to investigate non-Aboriginal children's construction and understanding of Aboriginal Australians. 37 non-Aboriginal children aged 4-5 years were asked questions about what they knew of Aboriginal people and cultures with questions such as 'Do you know any Aboriginal people?' and 'Can you tell me what you know about Aboriginal people?' (Mac Naughton & Davis 2001, p. 85). Several themes about children's knowledge of Aboriginal people emerged in the study. It was found that nine of the children used a black-white binary as an abstract tool for thinking about the differences between Aboriginal people and themselves. Only two children produced contemporary, political understandings of being Aboriginal in Australia (Mac Naughton & Davis 2001, p. 85). When asked about Aboriginal people in Australia, most children could only define Aboriginal people through their 'differences' to themselves and 'positioned [Aboriginal people] as the exotic' (p. 86). More concerning are the views of the educators in this research. Several themes emerged about the educators' understandings and knowledge of Aboriginal people and how this influenced their practice. While all educators had knowledge of Aboriginal people and their cultures, not all educators found it necessary or important to incorporate or consider this knowledge in their curriculum (Mac Naughton & Davis 2001, p. 86). Only two educators challenged deficit understandings of Aboriginal people (Mac Naughton & Davis 2001, p. 86). The research highlights the binary positioning of Aboriginal people and demonstrates how some educational programs are reinforcing difference. Furthermore, young children's understandings of Aboriginal peoples include past traces of colonialism. Additionally, Mac Naughton and Davis's (2001)

research demonstrates how discourse works to privilege the status quo and marginalise other groups.

Similarly, research conducted by Robinson and Diaz (2006) focussed on educators' understandings towards multicultural and anti-racist education. It was ascertained that educators' understandings towards multicultural and anti-racist education was confined to educators' knowledge of children at the setting rather than their knowledge of children's home, community and culture. Some of the comments drawn from their research include: 'there are no Aboriginal families in our setting but if there were, then that would be important' and, 'this [Aboriginal culture] is not the majority background at our centre, so it is not incorporated actively' (Robinson & Diaz 2006, p.75). It was concerning that some of the comments made by the educators highlighted that Aboriginal issues were only addressed when there were Aboriginal children attending the setting. Aboriginal issues related to curriculum and care were only relevant when there were 'visible' Aboriginal children and families attending the setting. This type of colour-blindness discourse reinforces practices that position particular cultures as less than or 'other'. International scholar Angelina Castagno (2014, p. 50) affirms that an act of colour-blindness 'reifies whiteness'. Participants in Robinson and Diaz's research who align with colour-blind perspectives preserve inequity and perpetuate deficit ideologies (Castagno 2014, p. 73). This is in direct conflict with the expectations of early childhood settings whose work is 'ensuring that children in all early childhood education and care settings experience quality teaching and learning' (DEEWR 2009, p. 5) as guided by the Early Childhood Australia's (2016) Code of Ethics. The Early Childhood Australia's (2016) Code of Ethics is a framework for educators to guide critical reflection and to 'make informed fair decisions' that benefit all children and families (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Farmer & Dockett 2014, p. 112).

Guilfoyle Sims, Saggars and Hutchins (2010) observed in their research that the success of any early year's program is dependent on programs that are implemented in 'such ways that they are culturally strong' (Guilfoyle et al. 2010, p. 68). Identified in their research as core to early years education, Guilfoyle et al. (2010, p. 68) assert that culturally strong programs integrate 'culturally based beliefs, values and practices, including child-rearing practices' of the families as an example of best practice. They further describe culturally appropriate practices as those that are relevant to the values of the local community and which have been identified by the local community (Guilfoyle et al. 2010, p. 68). Their findings indicate that to increase Aboriginal children's participation in formal early

childhood education, providers must offer a culturally appropriate service that reflects the cultural knowledge and practices of their respective Aboriginal communities (Guilfoyle et al. 2010, p. 74).

Culturally appropriate care, culturally strong programs and respectful relationships with Aboriginal families and communities have been identified as important (Guilfoyle et al. 2010; Milgate 2016). Bowes, Kitson and Burns's (2010, pp. 7-8) research describes the viewpoints of 27 Aboriginal families in New South Wales on their experiences of early childhood education. Several key themes emerge, including: teaching children about culture; access, availability and participation in early childhood education and care; the importance of family and community connections in services; and staff-family communication. The families involved in the research clearly articulate the importance of education in the early years and further desire for early childhood settings an increase in staff who understand culture and are culturally competent (Bowes, Kitson & Burns 2010, p. 8). The authors conclude that cultural awareness and cultural competence training is imperative for non-Aboriginal staff to effectively engage with Aboriginal children and families.

Correspondingly, Trudgett & Grace (2011) identify 'trust' as an issue for some Aboriginal parents and communities. Trudgett & Grace (2011) conducted interviews with 15 mothers of Aboriginal preschool aged children to explore their experiences engaging with early childhood services. The authors identify in their study several themes which are common to the experiences of Aboriginal families and parents. These themes include: lack of respect for Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing; lack of respect for kinship networks; and the need for trusting relationships between educators, families and children. Any engagement in early childhood services on the families' part was considered 'through the lens of trust' (Trudgett & Grace 2011, p. 21). Families not only emphasised the issue of trust but also emphasised quality of care and establishing relationships as vital for engagement with services (Trudgett & Grace 2011, p. 22). All the parents identified 'trust' as the guiding factor in their choice of child care along with notions of early childhood settings as 'spaces of cultural learning' where Aboriginal cultures were valued (Trudgett & Grace 2011, p. 30).

Davis (2005) uses deconstructive talk (Lenz Taguchi 2006) and critical reflection as a means to not only challenge her whiteness but to begin to really value Aboriginal cultures. Davis (2005) creates a space of cultural learning and questions the use of images and

activities in the early childhood curriculum that are intended to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. Upon reflection, she notices that she is positioning Aboriginal peoples and cultures as exotic and something to be admired from a distance. Davis confronts through critical reflection and deconstructive talk, her encounters with racialized practices. This enables her to further examine and question her practice. Davis enters a 'space of cultural learning' centred on how her beliefs and assumptions as a non-Aboriginal person are privileged in the early childhood curriculum. Lenz Taguchi (2006, p. 272) explains deconstruction as being 'about purposeful disruptions, destabilisations ... and challenges to taken for granted notions, values, practices, and pedagogy-as usual' (Lenz Taguchi, 2006, p. 272). Deconstruction cannot possibly remove all inequities but it can be an approach to help educators to remain ethically focused (Mac Naughton 2005, p. 108). Davis (2005 cited in Mac Naughton 2005, p. 185) demonstrates in the following quote her journey of questioning and deconstructing her practice to open up possibilities for practice. Davis states:

Critical Race Theory and Whiteness encouraged me to look at my own world and culture and with this encouragement I could more clearly see how I acted and practised. As my understandings further developed I increasingly found examples and instances within my own practice and my own life where colonialism and 'whiteness' acted (and continue to act). (Davis cited in Mac Naughton 2005, p. 185)

Davis demonstrates the act of deconstruction through disrupting the choices available to her as an educator and her understandings of incorporating an Aboriginal perspective in curriculum. Parker (1997, pp. 143–144) affirms that educators are faced with decisions and 'potentially endless levels of choice which we can contrive to forget or conceal but which deconstruction is always ready to uncloak'. Deconstruction provides choices about how we privilege whiteness in early childhood. For Davis, knowledge of Critical Race Theory and whiteness enabled her to critique racialized practices and 'interrupt racism' (Mac Naughton 2005, p 187). Davis's response demonstrates a culturally responsive approach to disrupting the normalised discourse of how curriculum should be enacted. Young, Zubrzycki, Green, Jones, Stratton and Bessarab (2013, p. 188) position cultural responsiveness as more suitable than cultural competence:

Instead of asking "competent to do what?" as does cultural competence, cultural responsiveness asks, "respond to whom, how, and what informs the responses?" These questions suggest a client group (to whom), a set of skills (how), and knowledges (what) to be employed. What is not so readily considered is the question of ownership and authorization. (Young et al. 2013, p. 188)

Culturally responsive approaches are also identified as a significant issue in Konakov, Robertson and Beckett's (2012) research. They argue that culturally responsive approaches

are a useful way forward for programs to reflect on the cultural knowledge and practices of their respective communities (Konakov et al. 2012). Similarly, Guilfoyle et al. (2010, p. 74) conclude that to increase Aboriginal children's participation in early learning, providers must offer culturally appropriate services that reflect the cultural values and practices of their local Aboriginal community. International scholars Belgarde, Mitchell and Arquero (2002, p. 43) affirm the importance of educators working to 'infuse the curriculum with rich connections to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds within family and community contexts' (Belgarde, Mitchell & Arquero, 2002, p.43). This requires an understanding that the child's family and community is the child's first educator. Sims (2011, p.1) affirms that early childhood services are perceived to be more effective for Aboriginal children and families when they address cultural competence. Belgarde, Mitchell & Arquero (2000, p. 43) also affirm the importance of cultural competence and establish that a culturally competent educator is one that 'validates the cultures and language of students' and instils in programs and curriculum 'rich connections to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds'. This information is significant because it presents narratives of successful engagement with Aboriginal children and families and points to culture as the place where education must begin for Aboriginal children (Milgate 2016). This requires responsive educators. Perso (2012, p. 22) suggests that this responsiveness is an outcome of cultural competence. The following section explores further the literature of cultural competence.

## ***2.6 Cultural competence and discourses of 'difference'***

There are several terms used within the literature including cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, cultural safety, culturally appropriate, culturally responsive and culturally competent, just to name a few. Most of these terms have been cited across several disciplines including in the health care, social work and education literature, but many are not clearly defined or conceptualised. A review of the literature reveals a significant amount of scholarship in relation to cultural competence within the health field, particularly in the social work field, but less in the education field. Beginning with earlier definitions of cultural competence, Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs (1989, p. 189) define cultural competence as:

a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. (Cross et al. 1989, p. 189)

Primarily used within the health care field, Cross et al. (1989) advocate for cultural competence as the fifth component in a six-component developmental process with cultural proficiency at the highest level of development. The continuum begins with cultural destructiveness which ‘refers to attitudes, practice and policies that promote the superiority of the dominant culture and attempts to eradicate the inferior and different culture’ (Lum 2011, p. 25). At the other end of the Cross et al. (1989) continuum of cultural competence is cultural proficiency. This is characterized by Cross et al. (1989, p. 17) as ‘holding culture in high esteem’. Although the definition provided by Cross et al. (1989, p. xi) acknowledges the ‘important role which culture plays in the lives of all human beings’, the focus appears to be on the achievement of goals by the individual, system or organization. Overall (2009) extends his definition to include an aspect of ways of being culturally competent through interactions. Overall (2009, p. 176) defines cultural competence as:

the ability to recognise the significance of culture in one’s own life and in the lives of others; to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into service work and institutions. (Overall 2009, p. 176)

Whilst Overall’s (2009) definition recognises the important role of culture, he also presumes that one can ‘fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into service work’ (Overall 2009, p. 176). Cross et al. (1989) and Overall (2009) all give emphasis to responding to the ‘unique needs of populations whose cultures are different than that which might be called “dominant” or “mainstream”’ (Cross et al. 1989, p. 3). There is a concern that the definition given by Cross et al. (1989) emphasises ‘minority’ populations; it is important to acknowledge that their work is directed towards an audience within a particular time and context. Nevertheless, it has laid the foundations for understanding cultural competence and has made some important contributions in the education field. Subsequently the term ‘cultural competence’ has evolved over time.

Fitzgerald (2000, p.184) affirms that at the individual level, cultural competence is:

the ability to identify and challenge one’s cultural assumptions, one’s values and beliefs. It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another’s eyes, or, at the very least to recognise that others may view the world through different cultural lenses. (Fitzgerald 2000, p.184)

This definition asks peoples to delve into the social and historical context in which they have been raised and educated, to interrogate their worldview to have an appreciation of how their values, beliefs and biases have developed and to further explore their own places of privilege. Every individual is immersed in their own worldview and it is common to

regard our own worldview as the only valid way to view reality (Ranzijn, McConnochie & Nolan 2009, p. 17). These types of assumptions can at times be destructive towards peoples from cultures different from our own. Ranzijn, McConnochie and Nolan (2009, p. 17) affirm that these postulations position one's own worldview as right and anything else as inferior. At worst, this type of misunderstanding manifests itself in acts leading to 'oppression, persecution and even genocide at worst' (Ranzijn, McConnochie & Nolan 2009, p. 17). Interrogating our culture, values and worldviews is important, just as critically reflecting how we sometimes unknowingly make assumptions and push our own worldviews onto other people. Aboriginal scholar Pat Dudgeon (2000, p. 49) states that a 'critical starting point for the practitioner is to look inward – to take responsibility for gaining cultural awareness and sensitivity, not only toward people of another cultural group, but also toward their own culture'.

In the Australian education context, Perso and Hayward (2015, p. 1) define cultural competence 'as the capacity or ability to understand, interact and communicate effectively, with sensitivity, with people from different cultural backgrounds'. A strength of this definition is its reference to interacting, understanding and being sensitive to the diversity of backgrounds that exist within cultures. But, overall, there are many misconceptions within the various definitions provided of cultural competence as some are simple, inconsistent, biased and position the 'other' as inferior. Take the work of Cross et al. (1989) on cultural competence. They highlight in their 1989 monograph the important task of the individual in '[r]ecognizing the cultural complexity and rich diversity that exists among minority populations' (Cross et al. 1989, p.iii). Again, reference is made to 'minority' when they state that cultural competence 'assures appropriateness of care for minority populations (Cross et al. 1989, p. vii). A major criticism of the term cultural competence is the hidden assumptions behind the construct of cultural competence. Primarily a social construct, it operates predominantly from Eurocentric worldviews and theories deeply influenced by philosophies and assumptions that position the 'other' as different. This is evident in Cross et al.'s (1989) definition found in their monograph on culturally competent care. The values and beliefs of mainstream cultures is the standpoint taken and the status quo is enforced through a discourse of difference.

Cultural competence in the EYLF is based on the definition provided by Cross et al. (1989, p. 1). The EYLF affirm that cultural competence is:

a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross cultural

settings. (Tong & Cross cited in Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency 2008, p. 23)

The EYLF also draws on aspects of Perso and Hayward's (2015) definition of cultural competence as understanding, interacting and communicating effectively. The EYLF states that cultural competence is:

much more than awareness of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, respect, communicate with, and effectively interact with, people across cultures. (DEEWR 2010, p. 24)

A review of cultural competence in the early year's literature (DEEWR 2009; DEEWR 2010; SNAICC 2012; SNAICC 2013) claims that cultural competence is not only an important element in early childhood education, but is essential to ensuring the appropriateness and accessibility of early childhood education services to children from 'diverse communities' (DEEWR 2010, p. 27). The EYLF further describes cultural competence as:

- being aware of one's own world view;
- developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences;
- gaining knowledge of cultural practices and world views; and
- developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures.

(DEEWR 2009, p. 16)

While there is reference made to 'being aware of one's own world view', it does very little to provide insight into the complexity of individuals interacting with cultures other than their own. Nor does it refer to individuals and institutions, including early childhood services, to investigate and challenge existing racialized structures and racialized practices, that continually position Aboriginal people as the 'other'. It provides an idea that the 'culturally competent' person is an ideal to strive for while also reinforcing existing stereotypes about the 'other'. By way of an example, the EYLF affirms that:

[e]ducators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences. (DEEWR 2009, p. 16)

A Foucauldian lens would highlight the discourse of difference posited in the definitions on cultural competence that normalise practices that position Aboriginal children as inferior. At this point it is useful to critique definitions of cultural competence and seek to disrupt the unequal power relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians and work towards models that empower Aboriginal people. There is no agreed definition on cultural

competence that empowers Aboriginal people and does not take on the discourse of ‘one-size-fits-all’.

Several writers (Dean 2001; Lum 2011; Morris 2010; Kumagai & Lypson 2009) are critical of cultural competence, particularly about the methodology and operationalisation of it (Lum 2011, p. 1). Dean (2001) is critical about the construct of cultural competence and maintains that cultural competence ‘is consistent with the belief that knowledge brings control and effectiveness, and that this is an ideal to be achieved above all else’ (Dean 2001, p. 624). Dean questions how individuals become competent at something as complex as another culture when there is so much diversity within cultures. As noted previously, Dahlberg et al. (1999, p. 4) provided a similar argument to the concept of quality. I too contend that there are many differing views in the literature about what constitutes cultural competence. Foremost, there is the danger that the concept of cultural competence treats ‘cultural categories or groups as ... static and monolithic with defining characteristics that endure over time and in different contexts’ (Dean 2001, p. 625). In contrast to Dean’s (2001) perspective, the EYLF positions cultural competence as:

not static. As we move between and within diverse communities, our level of cultural competence changes in response to new situations, experiences and relationships. (DEEWR 2010, p. 27)

Against this backdrop, we can look critically at the definitions of cultural competence. An examination of the discourse that is prevalent in these definitions leads to the necessity of an approach that ‘leaves us pondering with a sense of unknowingness’ (Seamann, Proud & Martin 2012, p. 253). This approach directs educators to think critically, to challenge inequitable discourse and ‘to begin to disrupt the regimes of truth that govern the field of early childhood by ... learning to read for equity’ (Mac Naughton 2005, p. 117). This requires that we are constantly aware of our lack of understanding and our lack of competence.

It has been similarly argued by Dean (2001, p. 628) that a model in which an awareness of one’s lack of competence is the goal, rather than the establishment of competence. Dean affirms that instead of competence, one should think of gaining understanding as a ‘partial and evolving’ process (Dean, 2001, p. 624). Understanding comes (if it does at all) through engaging in rich dialogue. This is ongoing and may proceed in phases. Lum (2011, p. 3) emphasises that cultural competence ‘is a relational, dialogical process (a dialogue rather than an emphasis on worker’s competence) between the worker and the client, between cultures, and between peoples and context’. The emphasis here is on dialogue between

educators and families and communities. Prominent early childhood scholar Margey Whalley, who advocates for the building of positive relationships between educators and parents of young children, affirms this need for dialogue: ‘Don’t start with what you think is a good idea for the community – start with what the community wants’ (Whalley cited in Prichard, Purdon & Chaplyn 2010, p. 12). The EYLF points to partnerships and relationships with families and communities as vital to the success of the service. The EYLF affirms:

Building genuine partnerships involves a commitment to respectful and reciprocal relationships and to supporting families as children’s first and most influential teachers. (DEEWR 2010, p. 17)

As noted previously, Dean (2001, p. 628) advocates for ‘working from an appreciation of one’s lack of competence’. In this way, emphasis is on participating in an ‘ongoing process of seeking understanding and building relationships’ (Dean 2001, p. 628). Similarly, Sims (2011) states:

Cultural competence requires more than an awareness of Indigenous culture, but a willingness to engage with heart as well as mind; an engagement many service providers find difficult given the mismatch between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures on fundamental beliefs around children, child-rearing and the roles of parents and community. (Sims 2011, p. 11)

Respectful engagement with families and communities is important. As evidenced in the previous section, trust and developing respectful relationships with families and communities are important factors in early childhood education. Relationships and dialogue provide space for educators to critically reflect upon their own assumptions and the fixed meanings they may encounter and seek creative ways to open dialogue to ‘embrace their own moments of not-knowing’ (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo 2012, p. 270). Furlong and Wight (2011, p. 49) suggest that engaging in dialogue offers the possibility of better identifying and interrogating discourses of truth and knowledge. Interestingly, Furlong and Wight (2011) prefer to advocate for the use of critical awareness in place of cultural competence. They argue that the term cultural competence lacks conceptual coherence whereas critical awareness encourages one to work to the principles of ‘curiosity and from a point of ‘informed not knowing’ (Furlong and Wight 2011, p. 39). This corresponds with the continuum provided by Cross et al. (1989) which provides ‘some perspective to the journey of developing intentionality in one’s practice’ (Morris 2010, p. 320).

I contend that it is doubtful that ‘one can become competent at the culture of another’ (Dean 2001, p. 623). Troubling the concept of competence leads to a change in thinking of

the term as a structure and method to people and relationships. Morris (2010, p. 319) states that ‘the word competence offers a sense of absoluteness, certainty, and clarity, invoking ideas of mastery, proficiency, and efficacy’ (Morris, 2010, 319). Similarly, Kumagai and Lypson (2009, p. 783) establish that the problem with the concept of ‘competence’ in education, is that ‘competencies are often categorized into learning outcomes involving knowledge, skills, and attitudes to allow for educational approaches which address each of these areas’. Cultural competence in the EYLF has a specific focus on attitudes, knowledge and skills at the individual, organisation and system level (DEEWR, 2010, p. 25). Such a focus suggests that cultural competence is a performance-centred approach more so than a relational approach. This is reiterated by Morris who critiques the cultural competence continuum that is presented by Cross et al. (1989). Morris (2010, p. 321) states that the six-stage continuum ‘resembles a linear and sequential actualization of higher states of competency’ that leads culture open to interpretation. Clearly, there have been several criticisms about the effectiveness of cultural competence, mainly addressing its uniform approach to defining cultures and the potential for misuse of the term.

Rajaram and Bockrath (2014, pp. 82-83) affirm that cultural competence is adequate as a tool to increase one’s cultural awareness and sensitivity, but acknowledge that cultural competence further requires a ‘critical understanding of the underlying socio-political and economic processes of power, privilege and institutional racism that create, support and maintain ... disparities’. They point to a limitation related to more than just interrogating our worldviews but more to investigate and challenge ‘existing racial and cultural structures’ (Rajaram & Bockrath 2014, p. 84). Cultural competence that is framed within a discourse of the ‘disadvantages borne by minority groups – not in the advantage of dominant group membership’ (Jensen 2005, p. 551) fails to address power and privilege. To this end, Rajaram and Bockrath (2014) call for cultural humility to address the inequities that cause such disparities. Cultural humility has some similarities with the concept of cultural competence in that it addresses an ‘ongoing process of learning’ (Rajaram & Bockrath 2014, p. 84) in the same manner that the EYLF addresses ‘a journey of learning’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 25).

Comparatively, cultural humility calls for individuals to undertake ‘a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique, to redressing the power imbalances ... and developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic ... advocacy partnerships with communities’ (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia 1998, p. 117). The three main components of a cultural humility approach are summarised as self-reflection, assessment of power imbalances and

developing relationships. Another fundamental core issue of a cultural humility approach is a continual journey as there is no endpoint or ‘ability to acquire ‘competence’, as one is always in a state of lifelong learning’ (Nomikoudis & Starr 2016, p. 71). Several writers (for example, Tervalon & Murray-Garcia 1998; Rajaram & Bockrath 2014) have also considered cultural humility as more appropriate to address structural power disparities through inquiry processes (Rajaram & Bockrath 2014, p. 87). This accentuates the role of cultural competence training and professional learning.

As noted previously, Bowes, Kitson and Burns (2010) identify in their research that cultural competence training is important to enable non-Aboriginal staff to effectively engage with Aboriginal children and families. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), the national peak body representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, also affirms that within early childhood settings, educators’ participation in ‘cultural competence training is an important commitment’ (SNAICC 2012, p. 9). Sims (2011, p. 12) also highlights the importance of educators undertaking ‘development of cultural competency’. A review of the literature about cultural competence professional development is fraught with issues. By way of an example, in their review of cultural competence in the delivery of health service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Bainbridge, McCalman, Clifford and Tsey (2015) suggest that although professional learning in cultural competence:

might be expected to impart knowledge upon which behavioural change will develop, it has generally not been enough when it is delivered in isolation or rapidly delivered over short timeframes. (Bainbridge et al. 2015, p.3)

Ranzjin, McConnochie and Nolan (2009, p. 10) also situate short professional learning opportunities as impractical. They affirm: ‘One-or two-day workshops or intensive short courses simply don’t provide sufficient time’. Mac Naughton (2005, p. 196) also points to single, isolated workshops as the ‘least effective way to excite learning and change in teachers’. Cooper and Boyd (1997, p. 2 cited in Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 197) state that ‘two months after teachers attend a one-off workshop, only 16–20% of them’ have enacted change. In addition, Fredericks (2008, p. 83) affirms that one-off workshops do not provide enough of an incentive for individuals to ‘change their practice or ... reflect on their ideas within their normal modes of operation’. Brown EL (2004, p. 325) extends this concern by suggesting that isolated one-off workshops provide opportunity for some educators to ‘enter and exit stand-alone cultural diversity courses unchanged, reinforcing their stereotypical perceptions of self and others in the process’. In the same manner, Kumagai and Lypson (2009, p. 783) state that ‘focusing exclusively on the cultural mores of

nondominant groups threatens to turn cultural competency education into what Wear has termed cultural “safaris”. There is no possibility of becoming culturally competent, but there is the possibility of undertaking a lifelong journey of learning and therefore a need to rethink the knowledge/power relations of existing approaches to professional learning (Mac Naughton 2005, p.196; Young et al. 2013, p. 187). Mac Naughton (2005, pp. 200 - 205) proposes challenging the individualistic nature of some professional learning by advocating for professional learning community clusters as spaces to stretch thinking beyond the ‘regimes of truth’ that currently construct our understandings. This section has pointed to the dichotomy between what constitutes cultural competence and assertions that cultural competence is an attainable measure (Kumas-Tan, Beagan, Loppie, MacLeod, and Frank 2007, p. 548). It has also been argued that cultural competence cannot be entirely behaviour-focussed nor delivered as an ‘add-on’ or isolated one-off workshop as an outcome to be achieved (Furlong & Wight 2011, p. 39).

It has been ascertained that early childhood settings are ‘cultural sites that embody conflicting political values, histories and practices’ (Giroux 2001, p. 37). The EYLF encourages educators to draw upon a range of theoretical frameworks to aid in the interpretation of their experiences (DEEWR 2010, p. 11). This in fact fosters educators to also challenge some of the implicit assumptions made that influences their pedagogy. As noted in a previous section, early childhood educator Davis (2005) utilised aspects of Critical Race Theory to problematise and interrogate racialized practices. Traditionally developed by legal scholars during the 1970s to address the effects of racism in the US legal system (Tate 1997), Critical Race Theory offers researchers in education a framework which provides ‘greater ontological and epistemological understandings of how race and racism affect the education and lives of the racially disenfranchised’ (Parker and Lynn 2002, pp. 7–8). Furthermore, Critical Race Theory is an evolving construct that strives to disrupt racism in educational theory and practice (Solórzano 1998). It has been demonstrated in the review of the literature that the effects of colonisation continue to portray themselves in our present-day reality through their overt and covert operations in institutions, systems, practices and discourses. I argue that there is a need to critically review the way things operate in order to interrogate the apparatuses that produce racialized discourse and practices.

Critical Race Theory is also concerned with truth as a ‘social construct created to suit the purposes of a dominant group’ (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, p. 92), thus converging with Foucauldian concepts to truth claims, power and knowledge. For this reason, Critical Race

Theory in this research offers the possibility of ‘unmasking, exposing, and confronting continued colonisation within educational contexts, thus transforming those contexts and structures for Indigenous peoples’ (Haynes Writer 2008, p. 2). Critical Race Theory brings to the fore stereotypes and misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples that are ‘legitimized by the accumulated body of literature and the use of dominant languages’ (Chilisa 2012, p. 70). The dominant language produces dominant stories and narratives that normalise the privilege of the status quo. This was demonstrated previously by early childhood educator Davis (2005) who drew on aspects of Critical Race Theory to disrupt ‘the neutral concept of a colour-blind society in favour of a critical perspective that recognises the normality and thus invisibility of racism in our daily lives’ (Lopez 2001, p. 30), including disrupting the invisibility of racism in our pedagogical practices. Early childhood educators are in a prime position to draw upon Critical Race Theory as a framework to contribute to not only advocacy for the rights of children but also to challenge and disrupt ‘normalising discourses through the curriculum that we teach, the policies that inform our practice and the pedagogies that we utilize in teaching children’ (Robinson & Diaz 2006, p. 8).

Critical Race Theory ‘in education challenges the dominant discourse ... by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups’ (Solórzano 1998, p. 122). Critical Race Theory has much to offer within the Australian context as a useful analytical tool for not only disrupting racism but critiquing the operation of cultural competence. By way of an example, Vass (2012), a non-Aboriginal researcher, draws on Critical Race Theory to identify the subtle and everyday ways that the status quo is re-affirmed in classroom discourse and pedagogy. His research demonstrates that at times discourse and pedagogy reproduces and maintains oppressive structures within education for Aboriginal students. Drawing on the works of Foucault (1980) and aspects of Critical Race Theory has potential to highlight the discourse of cultural competence as a tool to govern our thinking, ‘thoughts and actions in a specific direction’ (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999, p. 31), perhaps to the detriment of the intended cause. Similar to Brayboy (2006, p. 428), I contend that the purpose of education is to utilise necessary frameworks to disrupt and problematise racialized discourses and pedagogy. Brayboy (2006, p. 428) argues that ‘Critical Race Theory in education is activist in nature and inherently must contain a commitment to social justice’. The review of the research points to Critical Race Theory as significant to address issues related to privileging the narratives of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early years educators in an attempt to understand the complexities of cultural competence.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The review of the literature has highlighted how early schooling systems were designed to assimilate, ‘civilize’ and impart knowledge to Aboriginal peoples. The review of the literature also demonstrates the ways in which deficit thinking normalises Aboriginal children as inferior to their non-Aboriginal counterparts beginning with early education policies and continuing through to contemporary policies. It has also been revealed that the ongoing legacy of colonial, political, discriminatory and racialized discourses has dominated and determined policy-making in education through generations (Gray & Beresford 2008). Additionally, data and data collection methods have been discussed as vehicles to position Aboriginal students as inferior compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Foucauldian concepts have illuminated how certain truths are positioned and rationalised as normalised through practices that contribute to unequal power relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

I also highlight how discourses on cultural competence are fraught with complications as the literature points to the difficulties in operationalising the concept in practice. I discuss the limitations of cultural competence and argue that a nuanced and sophisticated poststructuralist understanding of cultural competence is required. Cultural humility is additionally identified in the literature as another guiding concept for ethical and effective practice where the individual maintains a constant state as both learner and self-reflective practitioner (Nomikoudis & Starr 2016 pp. 70-74).

The review of the research also points to aspects of Critical Race Theory as a framework to problematise racialized policies and discourses and to ‘cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority’ (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). Of relevance to this thesis is the creation of new narratives that conceptualise early years educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. The views of early years educators, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, contribute to understanding the socio-political, historical factors, conscious and unconscious, affecting the discourse of cultural competence. This research additionally addresses a gap in research on cultural competence and how educators position themselves within the discourse of cultural competence. The following chapter outlines the methodological and theoretical framework of this research and the choice of research processes.

## **CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical possibilities and research design**

### ***3.1 Introduction***

The previous chapter presented a review of the research and publications on cultural competence and discussed the difficulties in operationalising the concept in practice. Foucault's concepts illuminated how certain truths are normalised within discourse and how it can perpetuate unequal power relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In Chapter Three, I situate this study within a theoretical framework that drives the research and becomes the lens through which we view the world (Merriam 2002). In conceptualising my own lens as an Aboriginal person, I draw on various Australian Aboriginal and International Indigenous scholars to position my ontological and epistemological perspectives and discuss the methods used to explore educators' understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence.

Several paradigms were considered to fully represent the complexities of human understanding and the different ways that people make sense of their world. Because of the nature of my study and the topic, it was important that I used methods that would draw out participants' understandings and would also be representative of their voices. Following an introduction to mixed methods research, the chapter is divided into two main sections to describe and discuss the research methodology. This chapter also provides details related to the recruitment of participants and an introduction to the data analysis for each method.

In the introduction to this research, I situated my standpoint and highlighted my passion about this research topic. The aim of the research was not to discuss in depth my subjective opinions and perceptions concerning my experiences in education but rather to provide the reader a window into my standpoint and understand my place within the research. My various positions; professional, intellectual and cultural have influenced the research questions, the aims of the research and the research design. I acknowledge that there are many possibilities and options for approaching cultural competence, particularly when working with Aboriginal children, families and communities. It is an important topic and I was eager to learn more from other early years educators about their understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence. To set the context for this chapter, the next section reflects on Indigenous methodologies.

### **3.2 Indigenous Methodologies**

The question of how researchers select and utilise research methods is multifaceted. As an Aboriginal researcher, this complexity takes a precise form within the values and beliefs that I hold about knowledge production (Weber-Pillwax 2004). One of the challenges that I am faced with is the requirement to connect my beliefs as an Aboriginal person with expected academic descriptions of appropriate research methodologies. This meant that I, as an Aboriginal researcher have to consider how to merge my own cultural expectations with the expectations of Western academia.

There is a growing body of literature that advocates Indigenous methodologies (Rigney 1999; Kovach 2005; Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Wilson 2008; Martin, 2003 and Lois 2007). In her book, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples*, Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 9) advocates for the identification of methodologies that are 'more respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful' to Indigenous peoples. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) also encourages that more attention be paid to not just the outcomes of the research but more to the research processes by having a 'critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices' (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 20). Tuhiwai Smiths encourages researchers to be mindful of methodologies that potentially essentialise Aboriginal cultures.

Renee Lois (2007, p. 132) poses the question 'what are Indigenous research methodologies?' Lois (2007, p. 132) then also provides insight into what shouldn't be accepted as true: 'to assume there is a singular answer to this question only feeds scholarly beliefs of essentialism'. Indigenous methodologies have been referred to by various authors as alternative ways of thinking (Lois 2007; Porsanger 2004). The term 'alternative' represents the research and the researcher as 'different' and/or 'unusual', 'unconventional' and 'marginal'. I contend that 'alternative' is not a term with which all Indigenous researchers concur. In the context of this research, Indigenous methodologies are defined as offering 'possibilities' and 'opportunities' for ways of thinking and knowing which are grounded in my own Indigenous epistemology. I articulate my own Indigenous epistemology based on the knowledge that Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples are heterogeneous in their cultures and epistemologies. Indigenous methodologies are very diverse in nature. For example, in South Australia alone there is great diversity in Aboriginal languages, histories, geographic locations and stories, albeit some strong parallels exist.

There is not a strictly articulated methodological framework under the banner of ‘Indigenous methodologies’ (Kovach 2010b; Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina 2013). In this research, I draw on the work of Indigenous scholars including Lester-Orbinna Rigney, (1999), Daryle Rigney (2014), Arbon (2006), Martin (2003, 2008) and Wilson (2001, 2008) to honour Indigenous worldviews within my study and as frameworks for reflecting on my own Indigenous worldview. The research of Daryle Rigney (2014), Arbon (2006) and Martin (2003) has been informed by their respective Indigenous epistemologies, which involve the specific country that they are from as well as their individual experiences. For example, Arbon’s (2006) thesis *Thurnda ngurkarnda ityrnda: ontologies in Indigenous tertiary education*, focusses on understanding resistance to Indigenous-led change within a tertiary institution in Australia. Her dissertation draws from within her nation’s Arabana worldview. In her thesis, she articulates her ontology through her Arabana philosophy, the land to which she is related and her ancestral stories. Through a process of experiencing, engaging and interpreting, she articulates her understanding of what it is to ‘be, know, and do as an Arabana Udyurla’ (Arbon 2006, p. 32).

Daryle Rigney (2014) draws on the notion of Ruwe<sup>8</sup>-Country that is grounded in Ngarrindjeri ontology. As noted previously, I too draw on Ruwe-Country as underpinning my ways of knowing. The underlying principle of Ngarrindjeri ontology is the interconnectedness of people, land and water. The Ngarrindjeri vision for country is that:

Our Lands, Our Waters, Our People, All Living Things are connected. We implore people to respect our Yarlumar-Ruwe (Country) as it was created in Kaldowinyeri (the Creation). We long for sparkling, clean waters, healthy land and people and all living things. We long for the Yarlumar-Ruwe (Sea Country) of our ancestors. Our vision is all people Caring, Sharing, Knowing and Respecting the lands, the waters and all living things. (Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006, p. 13)

The Ngarrindjeri vision for country is grounded in relational accountability to the lands, water and all living things. This is a common thread across many Indigenous methodologies. Relational accountability is understood to refer to the concept of interdependence with everything and everyone; Indigenous researchers must ensure that they are fulfilling their relationships with the world around them (Wilson 2001, p. 177; Martin 2005). Wilson elaborates further:

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation ... [therefore] you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research. (Wilson 2001, p. 177)

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<sup>8</sup> Ruwe – Ngarrindjeri word for country, land.

Prominent Aboriginal Scholar Karen Martin also draws on relatedness as a ‘particular manner of connectedness’ (Martin 2008, p. 69). Martin’s relatedness theory emphasises the importance of an individual’s relationship with others and ‘knowing the world’ (Martin 2008, p.69). ‘Knowing the world’ occurs through contexts and is maintained within conditions that are ‘physical, spiritual, political, geographical, intellectual, emotional, social, historical, sensory, intuitive’ (Martin 2008, p. 69). In her research, Martin (2003) centres her Quandomooka ontology by applying her nation’s ways of knowing, ways of beings and ways of doing to describe her methodology. Martin (2003) maintains that our ways of knowing and being are inseparable from our ways of doing and each informs the other, thus, emphasizing relatedness. Ways of knowing reflect the numerous ways in which context contributes to learning. This learning is inclusive of entities of land, animal, plants, water systems and people (Martin 2003, p. 209). Emphasis is also placed on processes of obtaining knowledge through different methods of ‘listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging and applying’ (Martin 2003, p. 209). Martin (2003) articulates ways of being as about ‘the rights we earn by fulfilling relations to Entities of country and self’ (Martin 2003, p. 209). Finally, Martin (2003) affirms that ways of doing become a combination and expression of our ways of knowing and ways of being. Martin states that for her Aboriginal ontology, ways of doing are represented in her ‘languages, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organisation and social control’ (Martin 2003, p. 210). Relevant to this research is Martin’s affirmation that ways of doing are representative of ‘our subsequent evolution and growth in our individual Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being’ (Martin 2003, p. 210).

Martin (2003) demonstrates the complexities of her worldview influencing all aspects of her research journey. She highlights several principles that structure and guide her research. I am particularly drawn to five core principles:

- Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival;
- Honouring Aboriginal social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal peoples;
- Emphasising the social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures;
- Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal lands;

- Identifying and redressing issues of importance for us.

(Martin 2003, p. 205; Martin cited in Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2010, p.3).

Drawing on these principles, I positioned myself throughout the research process and drew on my relatedness with my peoples and connection to country, and further emphasised 'place' as the forefront of my experiences. Research is undertaken by researchers in physical situations who are in some instances embedded in and shaped by culture and identity (Tuck and McKenzie 2014, p. 1). There have been many instances throughout this research journey that the significance of place has had a direct impact on my research.

### ***3.2.1 Situated on Ruwe (land) and navigating the discourse of ontology and epistemology***

My personal worldview is based on the Ngarrindjeri belief system and particularly Ngarrindjeri Ruwe, the Ngarrindjeri word for land/country. Ruwe/Ruwar is described by Hemming, Rigney and Berg (2010, p. 93) as a 'concept that encapsulates the interconnection of Ngarrindjeri people, their lands, waters and all living things. This includes the spirits of Ngarrindjeri ancestors'. Ngarrindjeri Ruwe is a place that influences and informs my ways of knowing, being and doing. As prominent Ngarrindjeri scholar Daryle Rigney writes:

Ngarrindjeri produce meaning in and through the production of place as it relates to stories of creation, the codes of behaviour associated with place, and the practise of engaging with people, places and all living things. Understanding these fundamental structuring forces comes from lived experiences. (Rigney & Hemming 2014, p. 539)

The essence of this quote is that 'place' grounds and shapes us, and nurtures the body and spirit. We do not exist in isolation; rather, we are related to and informed by place and all that connects us through relationships. It is this relationality and understanding that ultimately informs our worldview. Tagalik (2010) provides a useful metaphor that represents the collectiveness and uniqueness of Indigenous worldviews. Tagalik (2010, p. 13) affirms that, '[w]orldviews are like stones thrown into the water from which other circles grow'. I visualize this as a rock striking the water, the spreading ripples at the point of contact, creating a circular wave that spreads out in all directions, thus creating spaces between the ripples. Eventually the ripples collide and contour each other. These ripple fields are distinct but they eventually connect. Indigenous methodologies are unique and represented by distinct Indigenous epistemologies, each one represented by a holistic perspective and the interconnectedness of all living things. A metaphor such as this is useful to draw upon as it denotes an aesthetic awareness and partial awareness that cannot be grasped totally and which leaves interpretations open to other possibilities. Hillman

(1975, p. 156) clearly affirms their answer: ‘Metaphors are more than ways of speaking; they are ways of perceiving, feeling and existing’. Metaphors can help us to understand the world and allow our imagination and spirituality to connect with our Dreaming.

Research is undertaken by researchers in physical situations who are in some instances embedded in and shaped by culture and identity (Tuck & McKenzie 2014). There have been many instances throughout this research journey when the significance of place has had a direct impact on my research. Kovach (2010a) discusses the impact of stories, their connection to place and how these stories are located within our personal knowing and conceptual framework. Similarly, Johnson and Larsen (2013, p. 10) portray Indigenous place and context as crucial for knowledge which ‘comes in and through place’. Place has been significant in my research journey through the interconnections and interrelationships between people, language and ngatjis<sup>9</sup> which have had an important impact in some shape or form during my journey. Place has helped me to come to know and locate my epistemological stance from my own perspective and for my own purpose (Tuhivai Smith 1999). The next section describes my connection to place and the significance of my country in this research journey. However, first, it is important to acknowledge this key point, that my journey is my journey, and I do not claim to speak on behalf of Ngarrindjeri people. In the words of Aboriginal scholar Irene Watson:

I am one voice. The voices of my ancestors come from a circle of peoples, the first circle of humanity to form. Their voices were one when spoken in unison. The circle of people embraced the voices. They sang the song, repeating the process over and over. That was the law. The song sung. The circle formed. To be repeated over and over, circles of song sung across the lands and seas. (Watson 2002, p. 15)

Watson (2002) emphasises connection to place as personal yet relational. In the early stages of my research journey, my husband and our six children moved back to our Ruwe (country) located at Raukkan on the shores of Lake Alexandrina, South Australia. Raukkan is home to many Ngarrindjeri people and I was excited that my children were going to ‘grow up’ on country. It was during this time that I began to deliberate about my theoretical stance, my ontology and epistemology. I felt that I was obligated to construct a theoretical framework and standpoint about my ontology and the research process. I spent considerable time perusing the literature and found that although Creswell’s (2007) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches* and Crotty’s (1988) *Foundations of social research: meanings and perspective in the research process* were easy to follow, I still felt apprehensive. Ways of doing in the Western sense felt

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<sup>9</sup> Ngatji - Ngarrindjeri word for totem

sterile, impersonal and detached. At this time, the literature implied (to me) that only one dominant epistemic paradigm existed.

I realised that the question of how researchers work with and select research methods was complex. One of the challenges that faced me was the requirement to connect my beliefs as an Aboriginal researcher with expected academic descriptions of appropriate research methodologies. This meant that I, as an Aboriginal researcher, had to consider how to merge my own cultural expectations and the expectations of Western academia. Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009, p. 1) also affirm that Indigenous researchers can face numerous obstacles and difficulties in articulating how Indigenous priorities and interests can be met. Crotty (1988) asserts that the researcher is required to identify, explain and justify the epistemological stance he or she has adopted as this influences their research design and methods. My worldview, my ways of knowing and being, ultimately influenced the choice of research topic, the choice of research paradigm to guide the study, and the choice of data gathering and analysis methods.

As I began to research, I read intensively to understand the relevant ‘Western’ scholarship. I also began to procrastinate as I felt obliged to connect with a ‘dominant epistemic paradigm’ which lacked personal resonance (Kuokkanen 2008, p. 74). The following extract from my research journal illustrates my feelings:

*I am feeling enormously frustrated and discouraged that I can't seem to 'connect, tag and label' the way I think and believe things to be with the literature, I need some space away from this cycle of doubt and confusion (September 2014).*

I realised that inaction was not conducive to this research journey but I believed that if I expressed personal views, my own epistemic paradigm that differed from the ‘norm’, I might be misunderstood. I often tried to continue writing but always left it feeling despondent, feeling that perhaps I was doing the wrong thing. I felt like I was playing ‘around the sharp edges of the language binaries that define [the] Western’ (Kovach 2010b, p. 59). Such confusion led to procrastination at many different levels.

Nevertheless, I persevered and can say now that it was ‘place’, my country, that influenced my understandings. My connections to my country and my community are the foundations of my identity (Bunda 2008, p. 2). While living at Raukkan, I had a moment of revelation as I watched my children walk to Raukkan Aboriginal School. I sat watching and listening to their laughter, their carefree movements, joking and bantering with each other. I began thinking about some of the yarns my elders told me over the years about Raukkan and

about the significance of land, country, water, family, relationships and culture. I thought to myself, 'I need to do this; I can't keep procrastinating because I can't decipher and untangle this messy language system of Western academia'. It was time to return to this section of writing that I had put off long enough. The significance of 'place' in this research journey is important as it is place of country that clarified my thoughts around the purpose of the journey. Battiste (2007, pp. 115–116) echoes my perceptions and thoughts when she writes that:

Indigenous people's epistemology is derived from the immediate ecology; from peoples' experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and memory, including experiences shared with others; and from the spiritual world discovered in dreams, visions, inspirations and signs interpreted with the guidance of healers or elders. (Battiste, 2008, p. 499)

This revelation was significant then in the context of my country surrounded by my spiritual ancestors and my ngatjis serving as signs to persevere. As indicated previously, ngatjis are important to Ngarrindjeri and are most often represented through the relationships we have with them. For me, this is the black swan. Our ngatjis represent to us not only a symbol of companionship or protection, but also the relationships we have with a plant or animal. For instance, there are certain rules and obligations associated with totems including that we must never intentionally harm our totem. Throughout this journey, the black swan reminded me of the purpose of this research and signified the need to forge forward in this writing. I returned to the literature and discovered that I was not the only Aboriginal person who grappled with Western academic discourse. I continued to review some of the dominant paradigms of knowledge and its production and felt comfortable being in a space which was uncomfortable but innovative as I searched for meaning. At times, it was hard to articulate this new learning but I acknowledged that I had to have an understanding and an appreciation of the dominant paradigms before I could continue my journey.

Ross (2007) also affirmed the direction I was taking and the deep reflection I was experiencing was typical. Ross (2007, p. 26) states that 'our perceptions of the world come from our experiences with the world, and our experiences are shaped by culture'. I have always strongly believed that there is no single way of understanding the world and I have always been reluctant to accept one point of view without searching for alternatives. For example, Ermine (1995, p. 108) writes that 'Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown'. But it is much more than this for me; it includes relationships

to living and non-living beings – it is interactive and relational (Martin 2005; Wilson 2001). In the words of Moreton-Robinson:

relationality means that one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligations, shared experiences, coexistence, co-operation and social memory. (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 16)

Indigenous knowledges are built upon relationships within family and community. This is not recognised in Western research paradigms that ‘ignore the role of imperialism, colonisation and globalisation in the construction of knowledge’ (Chilisa 2012, p. 8). Aboriginal scholar Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1999, p. 9) also affirms, ‘Research practices, protocols and epistemologies in modern Australia remain racially biased towards the dominant cultural ideologies’. Similarly, Kuokkanen (2008, p. 74) further suggests that ‘the epistemic foundations of the academy are narrow, the discourses that control what can be said and what is understood are set to function only within certain parameters’. I had one of two choices – learn a foreign way of speaking my perspective or pursue my own way of articulating and validating my ways of knowing as I developed my research practices and methodologies. Undertaking reflection and meandering through the unknown led me to a space of critical inquiry influenced by my worldview. Milton (1996, p. 62) argues that: ‘some of what we know, think and feel about the world comes to us directly through our experiences, in the form of discovered meanings’. I later returned to Adelaide to live, but I continued this journey and took with me my experiences and inquisitiveness to move forward and continue my reflections on the unknown.

It was around this time that I returned to the works of Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2001, 2008), who represents a non-linear framework of Indigenous methodologies. I felt comfortable with this framework. Wilson (2001) advocates that our thinking should move beyond axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology as separate entities, rather thinking about them within a circle in which one part blends with the next. Its holistic nature led me to investigate it further. Wilson (2001) argues that an Indigenous ontology may consist of multiple realities as in the constructivist paradigm. For example, the shared aspect of Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality and the shared aspect of Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships (Wilson, 2001). Therefore, relationality and relational accountability may be put into practice through the choice of research topic, methods of data collection and the form of analysis undertaken (Wilson 2008). Crotty (1988) also recognises that ontology and epistemology are mutually dependant on each other and are difficult to distinguish separately when he states: ‘to talk about the construction of meaning (epistemology) is to talk of the construction of a

meaningful reality (ontology)’ (Crotty 1988, p. 10). Wilson (2001) further asserts that reality is not an object but a process of relationships. Echoing Karen Martin (2005, 2008), he suggests that relationships are at the core of Indigenous ways of being and doing.

It was by engaging with the works of Wilson (2001, 2008) and other prominent Aboriginal researchers including Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Martin Nakata, Karen Martin and Aileen Moreton-Robinson that I could locate myself in this performance of ‘naming’ my ontological and epistemological position. What began as a mystery sometimes clouded with doubt led to a discovery of theories that could work to empower Aboriginal peoples to delve deeper into issues related to social justice and equity. I was also drawn to the work of Glenda Mac Naughton (2005) whose interests lie in social justice and equity issues in early childhood, and to Michel Foucault’s (1980) work on power, knowledge and discourse.

### ***3.2.2 Naming my position***

Returning to the methodology, it is essential to follow a storyline as such and share my assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge in connection to my epistemological stance. I was originally drawn to an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm just for the sake of ‘naming’ my position. An interpretivist-constructivist perspective perceives the world as constructed and interpreted by people in their interactions with each other and wider social systems (Creswell 2007). But through reflection, I realised that not everything can be known. Furthermore, it is difficult to define, deconstruct, or compartmentalise different aspects of knowing as these actions are contrary to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (Kovach 2010b; Martin 2003). Nevertheless, it was necessary for me to become uncomfortable to be comfortable with my philosophical stance. Martin (2003, p. 206) maintains that it is ‘through ontology that we develop an awareness and sense of self, of belonging and for coming to know our responsibilities and ways to relate to self and others’. Arbon (2006) also argues a similar position of relatedness and in discussing Indigenous engagement with Western ontologies and epistemologies, argues that there should be opportunities to ‘experience, engage and interpret’ (Arbon 2006, p. 3). This has certainly been my case while undertaking this research journey.

As explained in the introduction, my experiences as an educator have highlighted that real issues and effects arise from the application of colonial authority in and through education policies, curriculum and practices. I gathered that this was also the case within Western academia. I was concerned that Western academia as a system, as well as education policies, curriculum and practices, marginalise those with diverse ways of knowing but

also lead to the demoralising creation of binaries that polarise ‘the Western/Eurocentric’ and ‘the Indigenous others who are known about’ (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw 2015, p. 12). The ‘other’ is viewed as a deficit in the relationship and ‘knowing’ is formed in a specific culture (Mac Naughton 2003, p.306). Mac Naughton (2003, p.195) critiques interpretivist/constructivist paradigms, asserting knowledge as ‘problematic because it is socially constructed to serve the needs and interests of particular groups of people – all knowledge comes from culture and is, therefore, culturally limited and culturally bound’.

Evidently power relationships are manifested not just in society but also in language. I realised that it was an opportunity to expose how we unintentionally perpetuate dominant discourses in all that we do and do not do (Foucault cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982, p. 187). It was also an opportunity to challenge some of the colonial discourses still extant that have power to silence as invincible. I questioned the deficit elements reflected in the discourse about Aboriginal children and families and explored how this discourse affects pedagogical practices. This is an important element of Critical Race Theory and poststructuralist approaches where language is questioned, interrogated and challenged. We need to ask: ‘What is the purpose of this; whose interests does it serve? As an advocate of Critical Race Theory in education, Gillborn (2008, p. 2) insists that ‘language not only describes an issue, it helps to define the issue: it can make certain understandings seem natural and commonsensical, while others are presented as outrageous or unworkable’. Nevertheless, my Indigenous standpoint and my negotiation of the boundaries of Western methodologies and language enlightened the research process.

I am privileged that I had time to dismantle and explore research theory and situate myself within a theoretical framework. I recorded in my journal in July 2016:

*I have been drawn to two distinct frameworks that don't seem to be compatible with each other but I am reluctant to also draw simplistic concepts from both frameworks nor can I make a choice and choose one over the other, nor can I use one and then move onto the other in a linear fashion ... this doesn't make sense to me and contradicts all that I believe in...*

I decided that instead of positioning myself for or against any framework, I would follow the advice from Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009), Chilisa (2012) and Bunda, Zipin and Brennan (2012) that Aboriginal researchers should apply their own lenses, perspectives and understandings to their own research. I also drew on prominent Indigenous scholar Lester-Irabinna Rigney’s (1999) principles of what he refers to as ‘Indigenist’ research to guide my journey. Rigney outlines this as follows:

- resistance as the emancipatory imperative
- political integrity, and
- the privileging of Indigenous voices

(Rigney 1999, pp. 118 – 120)

Indigenist research can be summarised as engaging with resistance discourse that not only engages in the story of survival but also one of endurance that challenges the oppressive practices and processes that stem from colonisation (Rigney 1999). Indigenist research also requires the privileging of Indigenous voices to enable counter-stories to emerge. Furthermore, encouraging emancipatory research where Aboriginal peoples set their own research agendas and conduct research integral to their ways of knowing, being and doing leads to self-determination (Rigney 1999).

In this research, my ways of knowing, being and doing research was influenced by my own philosophical underpinnings based on my Ngarrindjeri background but also influenced by Aboriginal scholars including Karen Martin, Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Maggie Walters. It was not an easy journey to get to the choice of theoretical framework and I can say I don't think I have yet reached the endpoint if there even is one. I recorded in my personal research journal in September 2014 that I was feeling enormously frustrated and disheartened that perhaps I wasn't understanding the language of academia and struggled with the 'theory' of academia. From this time to mid-2016 I meandered in and out, interpreting and reflecting on theories and paradigms, had many conversations with another Aboriginal PhD candidate, navigated my way through the many theories on offer and eventually ground my research within a poststructuralist approach. The process of meandering was in fact reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2003).

### ***3.3 Mixed methods research***

As explained earlier, early childhood education is a key element in improving the future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The Early Years Learning Framework includes a specific section for 'growing educators' competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures' (DEEWR 2010, p. 24). The primary aim of the research was to explore educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence.

A mixed methods approach was chosen to allow a deeper insight into educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Utilising a mixed methods approach allowed for the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to achieve a range of outcomes. I pursued methods that would draw out educators' multiple understandings and realities on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence. I also followed the advice of Indigenous Scholar Tuhiwai Smith (1999) who advocates that:

The methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied. (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, p. 39)

Implementing a mixed methods research design would allow for the generation of rich data in a relatively unexplored area. I utilised Q methodology and an Indigenous methodology of yarning to answer the two research questions following the advice of Newman, Newman and Newman (2010). These writers suggest that 'the research design has to consider and reflect the purpose of the research' (Newman, Newman and Newman 2010, p. 195). The purpose of this research is in illuminating educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence and utilising a mixed methods approach was most suitable.

The term 'mixed methods' has been used to refer to the use of two or more methods in a research study that uses both qualitative and quantitative data to answer research questions that may value the use of several approaches (Tashakkori & Newman 2010, p. 514). Tashakkori and Newman (2010, p. 514) describe a mixed methods approach as a type of 'research design in which the findings of qualitative and quantitative methods are integrated in order to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under investigation'. The central premise underlying mixed methods research is that several approaches provide a better understanding of research problems that either approach would do alone. Greene (2005, p. 208) advocates for mixed method research design that recognises the multiplicity of philosophy per se and that pursues deeper understandings of educational phenomena. Greene (2005) refers to the advantages of utilising a mixed method approach in research:

A mixed method way of thinking seeks better, more comprehensive understanding of educational phenomena, understanding that is woven from strands of particularity and generality, contextual complexity and patterned regularity ... the whole and its constituent parts ... and so forth.

In effect, the literature (Greene 2005; Tashakkori & Newman 2010) advocates for the use of mixed methods to enable new and multiple understandings to emerge through

reconceptualising different epistemologies to value ‘multiple methodological traditions, multiple ways of knowing and multiple value stances’ (Greene 2005, p. 208).

Brady and Collier (2004, p. 5) suggest that there are strengths and weaknesses inherent in both qualitative and quantitative approaches which has resulted in a ‘major new methodological dialogue’ (Brady & Collier 2004, p. 195). The point of the argument is to appreciate what both approaches have to offer in order to reach the goal of developing a better understanding and explanation of the social world (Creswell 2007; Crotty 1998). Mixed methods research was utilised for its all-inclusive approach to:

obtain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The expectation is that such a more complete understanding will emerge if the inferences from qualitative and quantitative strands of a study are merged effectively. (Tashakkori & Newman 2010, p. 515)

It has been suggested that the use of mixed methods as a research method is an important part of the debate about what ‘constitutes valid, rigorous, and scientific research’ (Greene 2005, p. 207). It is not the intent to get too caught up in the epistemological and ontological debate that surrounds the issue of conducting mixed methods research. I recognise that qualitative and quantitative approaches ‘have different epistemic and ontological bases’ (Scott 2007, p. 4) and further that neither type of method is superior to the other. The researcher placed significant importance on converging methods to gain a fuller appreciation of educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. The primary purpose of utilising a mixed method approach in this research was to:

- bring transparency to complex, multifaceted discourses and constructions of ‘cultural competence’;
- be exploratory in nature to allow participants voices to prevail;
- explore a relatively unexplored phenomenon in educational research, one that relates to the idea of ‘cultural competence’ (Tashakkori & Newman 2010)
- complement the strengths of using a single design to explore the diverse views and perspectives of educators;
- explore renewed perspectives and more informative explanations about cultural competence generated from alternative paradigms (Greene 2005);
- develop a research tool (Cultural Competence Q sort) for drawing out understandings and perspectives towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.

This research is categorised as a convergence design using parallel phases to study the research problem ‘in its entirety and dimension’ (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado 2015, p. 119). Tashakkori and Newman (2010, p. 515) affirm that ‘in parallel designs, two sets of data (one qualitative and one quantitative) are collected and analysed independently at the same time or with a time lag’. The researcher utilises a convergent parallel design where quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently, analysed separately and then merged (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado 2015, p. 116).

Quantitative data is typically represented by numerical data, represented and analysed using statistical techniques, while qualitative data is typically collected using open-ended holistic approaches (Tashakkori & Newman, 2010, p. 514). In this research, the quantitative aspect was represented using Q methodology. Q methodology is viewed as a hybrid quantitative-qualitative method that combines the strengths of both research traditions (Watts & Stenner 2005). The aim of Q methodology in this study was to access as many alternative perspectives as possible and with the use of correlation and factor analytic techniques, group and describe these views to map educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Q methodology then, is an appropriate method that ‘represents an individual’s feelings, opinions, perspectives ... related to the topic’ (Newman & Ramlo 2010, p. 508). I further examine educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence through semi-structured interviews using an Indigenous methodology of yarning. Both approaches appear to be at opposite ends of the research design spectrum but both offer different viewpoints and both value different ways of knowing. Greene (2005) affirms that mixed methods:

actively engages with difference and diversity, again, of method and of values, as well as difference and diversity as manifest in the contexts in which we work. In short, a mixed methods way of thinking is itself anchored in values of toleration, acceptance and respect – of multiplicity and of difference. (Greene, 2005, p. 208)

To this end, a mixed method research approach was the chosen design for this research to allow new understandings to emerge. Q methodology and an Indigenous methodology of ‘yarning’ were chosen based on the ability of both methods to respect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, and ensure Indigenous voices were inclusive (Martin 2003). Walter and Anderson (2013) emphasise that: ‘the epistemology of methodology is about whose voices or knowledges are validated and prioritized, and perhaps even more decisively whose are not’ (Walter & Anderson 2013, p. 49). Innovative methods such as Q methodology and an Indigenous method of yarning have potential to ensure that counter-stories are privileged and shared to generate new understandings.

The previous section has provided a general introduction to mixed methods research utilised in this research. The remaining chapter describes both methods used in this research. The next section outlines Method 1 – Q methodology.

### 3.4 Method 1 – Q methodology

Q methodology was developed in 1935 by a British physicist-psychologist William Stephenson (1953) and was specifically developed to explore individual phenomena such as opinions, perspectives and attitudes (McKeown & Thomas 1988). It is a research method that provides a way to unravel individuals' complex partialities relating to a topic of interest to make their views accessible and transparent through statistical analysis. There are two main features of Q methodology – the collection of data using Q sorts and the analysis of those Q sorts using inter-correlation and by-person factor analysis (Watts & Stenner 2012).

According to both Newman and Ramlo (2010), Q methodology is a unique method that allows researchers to investigate research questions that involve determining the various views within a group about a specific topic. This is further supported by McKeown and Thomas (1998) who state that Q methodology represents a unique way for participants to provide their perspectives through the sorting of statements. In Q methodology, a person is presented with a set of statements about a topic and is asked to rank order them on a Q sort with a scale from -4 representing strongly disagree to +4 representing strongly agree (See Figure 1). This process is referred to as Q sorting. Each participant ranks the statements from his or her own point of view and it is this process that brings subjectivity into the picture (Brown 1980).

| DISAGREE |    |    |    |   |    | AGREE |    |    |  |
|----------|----|----|----|---|----|-------|----|----|--|
| -4       | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2    | +3 | +4 |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |
|          |    |    |    |   |    |       |    |    |  |

**Figure 1: Q sort grid**

Q methodology acknowledges the value and importance of studying the viewpoints individuals have of their worlds (McKeown & Thomas 1988, p. 12). Dryzek and Holmes (2002, p. 20) also affirm that Q methodology is the 'best developed paradigm for the investigation of human subjectivity'. Q methodology assumes that people's subjective experiences, understandings, ideas and beliefs are diverse, and its aim is to explore and to record that diversity. As Stainton Rogers et al. (1995, pp. 250-251) assert, 'Q methodology is ideal for addressing the critical kinds of research questions which are concerned to hear "many voices"'. Furthermore, it is important to note that Q methodology aims to uncover research participants' own understandings, not measure participants' understandings in relation to an operational definition imposed on them by the researcher. This is important in this research as the term 'cultural competence' is interpreted differently by individuals. In Q methodology, participant's understandings and perspectives emerge from the sorting process and data analysis. Further to this, Q methodology 'show[s] us the particular combinations or configurations of themes which are preferred by the participant group' (Watts & Stenner 2005, p. 70). The rigorous design of Q methodology is appropriate as a methodology to reach the aims of this research. The next section outlines the stages in Q methodology from design to application.

### **Stages of Q methodology**

Brown (1993), Van Exel and de Graaf (2005), Watts and Stenner (2005), and Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009) are among several authors who have produced 'primers' or guidelines on the use of Q methodology. The Q method includes five phases: (1) development of the concourse; (2) development of the Q set; (3) selection of a P sample; (4) the Q sort; and (5) data analysis. These phases are outlined as follows.

### **Development of the concourse**

The first step in Q methodology is the development of the concourse. The concourse consists of a set of general statements about a topic and could derive from 'interviews, publications and essays' (Valenta & Wigger 1997, p. 504) and published literature, research, articles, websites and focus groups (Brown 1993, p. 93). Brown M (2004, p. 4) states that 'the primary point is that the collection of items in the concourse should reflect the range of perceptions on a particular topic of interest' (Brown M 2004, p.4). The concourse on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence was obtained from the literature available. My research began with a broad search of the literature pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence. I limited my research to

Australia for two reasons. Firstly, Australia is where much of the literature on cultural competence was located. American literature primarily focused on ‘culturally responsive teaching’ and ‘culturally responsive pedagogy’. From the review of the literature, 100 statements were selected. From this a sample of Q statements was strategically selected to form the Q set. The selection process is described in detail below.

### **Development of the Q set**

The second step in Q methodology is selecting a subset of statements from the concourse to form the Q set. Various methods exist for the selection of the Q set: structured, unstructured, naturalistic or ready-made. Structured samples are planned and prepared in a systematic fashion and function to promote the use of theory testing (McKeown and Thomas 1998). Unstructured samples are chosen at random without ensuring coverage of all issues of the topic. McKeown and Thomas (1998, p. 28) concur that ‘the risk with unstructured samples is that some issue components will be under or over sampled’. Naturalistic samples derive directly from the concourse, such as statements made during interviews. Quasi-naturalistic Q samples derive from prior research, surveys or other sources. Hybrid Q samples include a combination of both naturalistic and ready-made methods (McKeown & Thomas 1998). The current study included the use of structured, ready-made and quasi-naturalistic methods to create the Q set. This approach minimised the risk of external meanings being attributed to statements because they were naturally drawn from the literature around the Early Years Learning Framework.

The Q set is developed through a filtering and sampling of the concourse, the goal of which is to provide a final set of statements without losing the representativeness of the content. It is acknowledged that the Q set ‘can never really be complete (as there is always something else that might be potentially said)’ but needs to ‘contain a representative condensation of information’ (Watts & Stenner 2005, p. 75). Brown (1970 cited in Webler, Danielson and Tuler, 2009, p. 10) highlights that the most important quality of the Q statements is that they should accurately represent what is said in the concourse. A second important quality of Q statements is that they should be able to be interpreted in the context of all the other statements, that is, Q participants should be encouraged to interpret the statement in the context of each other (Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009, p. 10). Ideally, there should be enough statements with a variety of opinions to cater for the widely different subjective perspectives the participants could have about the research topic.

This collection process resulted in over 100 statements which according to Stainton Rogers (1995, p. 185) is ‘typically around three times the size of the aimed-for Q set, say 200 for an aimed-for set of 65’. In the current study, 100 statements were selected to define the concourse and then reduced to yield a representative and clear set of 34 statements to be used in the Q sort process. From the original set, the researcher eliminated duplicate statements and rephrased complex statements. In the process of devising the final Q set, an expert group were approached to participate in this phase of the study. The expert group consisted of 6 people from the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, Early Learning and Quality Reform (ELQR) unit. The ELQR unit consists of members of the teaching profession who have been seconded to the Department to work on specific projects. Several of the project officers played a significant role in the writing of the EYLF, particularly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Competence section. It was an obvious decision to include members of the ELQR unit to assist in the development of the concourse around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.

Participants from the ELQR unit were informed about the aims and objectives of the study and were asked to check the appropriateness of the statements used in the study and ensure that they were clear and unambiguous. The participants did not sort the statements, but checked the Q statements for appropriate semantics, clarity, balance and representativeness. The pilot test was not about actually sorting but rather about reading the statements to ensure the Q sample was ‘comprehensive, balanced and representative’ of the topic (Brown M 2004, p. 4). It was also important to ensure that there was equal representativeness of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators at this stage of the research. Three Aboriginal participants participated and expressed their opinions and viewpoints on what statements they deemed appropriate for this research. Table one below shows the recommended changes from the original statements to revised statements as devised by the expert group.

| Statement Number | Original statement                                                                                            | Revised statement                                                                                                                         |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                | I understand the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my service. | I endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my service. |
| 4                | I respect multiple ways of knowing, seeing and living.                                                        | I value different cultures’ ways of knowing and being.                                                                                    |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Trying to be culturally competent all the time is nice in theory, but the reality is that time constraints limit a teacher's ability to meet each child's individual needs.                                                                      | I feel so constrained by lack of time that I struggle to meet every child's individual needs, including cultural ones.                                                          |
| 14 | My cultural way of life is the norm and the standard which guides my personal and professional interactions.                                                                                                                                     | My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs.                                                                             |
| 18 | It is not my business to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence in our site's philosophy statement as all cultures should be represented and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture should not be singled out. | It is not necessary to specifically include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence in our site's philosophy statement as all cultures should be represented. |

**Table 1: Recommended changes as suggested by the expert group – original statements and revised statements**

There were also statements that the expert group believed were repeated, therefore they suggested some new statements to fit in the context of all other statements. These are included in table two below.

| Statement Number | Original statement                                                                                                                              | New statement                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12               | I am willing and able to open myself up continuously to divergent cultural influences and experiences.                                          | I wait until I am given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our program so I don't do the wrong thing. |
| 21               | I avail myself to professional development to enhance my knowledge and skills in the provision of services and supports to Aboriginal families. | It is important for educators to recognise and promote culture in developing children's sense of being, becoming and belonging.                 |
| 30               | It is important to look at another perspective through another lens.                                                                            | Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in our program is too political.                                               |

**Table 2: New statements**

The final Q set consisted of 34 statements which offered sufficient breadth and balance of content as well as being appropriate in terms of the practicalities of sorting. Table three highlights the full list of the final 34 statements for the Q sort.

| Statement Number | Final Statement |
|------------------|-----------------|
|------------------|-----------------|

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | I endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my service.                                       |
| 2  | Cultural competence is an event.                                                                                                                                                |
| 3  | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in my service through the use of traditional images, posters and celebrations.                                         |
| 4  | I value different cultures' ways of knowing and being.                                                                                                                          |
| 5  | I understand the importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.                                                                           |
| 6  | I take responsibility for learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' culture and community.                                                                 |
| 7  | I am aware of my own worldview and how it impacts on my practice.                                                                                                               |
| 8  | While I do not believe in the practices and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, I tolerate them.                                                         |
| 9  | Awareness of cultural differences is the first step to becoming a culturally competent educator.                                                                                |
| 10 | I feel so constrained by lack of time that I struggle to meet every child's individual needs, including cultural ones.                                                          |
| 11 | I have attended a 'cultural awareness' training and am competent enough.                                                                                                        |
| 12 | I wait until I am given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our program so I don't do the wrong thing.                                 |
| 13 | I mainly consult with the local Aboriginal community when there are significant events e.g. NAIDOC week, Harmony day etc.                                                       |
| 14 | My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs.                                                                             |
| 15 | I acknowledge and value Aboriginal English as a means to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging.                                        |
| 16 | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's learning and use the cultural tools of the community.                                                                |
| 17 | I intervene when I observe other staff engaging in behaviours that show cultural insensitivity, biases and prejudice.                                                           |
| 18 | It is not necessary to specifically include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence in our site's philosophy statement as all cultures should be represented. |
| 19 | I avoid imposing values that may conflict or be inconsistent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.                                                               |
| 20 | I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site.                |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 21 | It is important for educators to recognise and promote culture in developing children's sense of being, becoming and belonging.                                                                                                      |
| 22 | I have undertaken cultural awareness training and am happy with my current knowledge of Aboriginal cultures.                                                                                                                         |
| 23 | I have a clear understanding of the explicit practice in the guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, 'The journey for educators: growing competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures'. |
| 24 | I am aware of the differences between cultural awareness and cultural competence.                                                                                                                                                    |
| 25 | I promote a system of continuous improvement and reflection in my practice.                                                                                                                                                          |
| 26 | In the last year, I have attended at least one professional learning session that has enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.                                                        |
| 27 | I don't see colour or culture in my service; my programs and practices are inclusive of all children regardless of culture.                                                                                                          |
| 28 | I advocate for the review of my site's philosophy statement and quality improvement plan (QIP) to ensure that they incorporate principles and practices that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.      |
| 29 | Cultural competence is an off-the-shelf program adding yet another educational buzzword.                                                                                                                                             |
| 30 | Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in our program is too political.                                                                                                                                    |
| 31 | I am confident that I have reached a high level of cultural competence.                                                                                                                                                              |
| 32 | I understand 'culture' and its important role in education.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 33 | Developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development.                                                                                                                                                       |
| 34 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are regularly included in our daily program.                                                                                                                                      |

**Table 3: Final set of statements for the Q sort**

### **Selecting the P sample**

The P sample comprises the selected group of participants sorting the Q statements. In Q methodology, the variables are the participants performing the Q sort rather than the items they are sorting. This is because the purpose of Q methodology is to find patterns of thought between people. McKeown and Thomas (1998) claim that considering the variables are the participants, the number of participants should be kept to a minimum. This is also supported by Watts and Stenner (2005, p. 79) who note 'large numbers of participants in a Q methodological context can itself be problematic' and that too many

participants could potentially ‘negate many of the subtle nuances, complexities and hence many of the essential qualities contained in the data’. The goal is to find patterns of thought, not how many peoples think a particular way. Watts and Stenner (2005, p. 79) suggest a 1:1 correspondence of people to statements. In comparison, Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009, p. 10) suggests that a ratio of 3:1 statements to people is used. He provides an example of a Q study that used a set of 45 Q statements and suggested that the ideal number of participants would be 15. He further states that many Q studies typically use between 12–20 participants. McKeown and Thomas (1998, p. 37) indicate that the P sample size simply ‘depends upon the nature and purpose of the study’. Therefore, for this study using 34 statements, 12 participants would be viewed as adequate. Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009, p. 10) further suggest that the highest ratio used should be 2:1.

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants participated in the Q sort ‘based on a specific purpose rather than randomly’ (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003, p. 713). The purpose was that the participants were familiar with the discourse of cultural competence as alluded to in the EYLF and would be able to contribute to the research. Merriam (2002, p. 12) wrote that ‘qualitative research inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, [and] it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned’. Burns (2000, p. 465) also contends that purposive, or purposeful sampling ensures that it attends to ‘the real purpose and objectives of the researcher of discovering, gaining insight and understanding into a particular phenomenon’ (Burns 2000, p. 465). An invitation to participate in the research was emailed to all 367 South Australian Preschool sites; this resulted in 21 Preschool educators from 21 sites who completed the Q sort. Although this may seem a very low response rate, an advantage of the Q sort method is that it requires relatively small samples of respondents. It is the diversity of respondents that is more important than the number of respondents. All that is required is a reasonable number of respondents to identify differing perspectives as factors for purposes of comparison (Watts & Stenner 2005; Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009).

### **3.4.1 The Q sort**

The primary purpose of a single participant conducting a Q sort is to reveal viewpoints and perspectives from the standpoint of the person conducting the Q sort (Brown 1988). Participants complete the Q sort according to their own perspective of each statement’s meaning and according to how those statements fit into their understandings and viewpoints. Sorting statements in this way allows participants to express similar attitudes about particular issues but to hold different perspectives about the topic as a whole (Barata

2007, p. 203). According to Redburn (1975, p. 767), 'the relative rankings of statements often give insight into the structure as well as the content of an individual's thinking'. Q methodology is based on the belief that this behaviour (allocation of statements) is an expression of participants' subjectivity.

This study utilises an online web platform for the Q sort. *Qsortonline* is an online software program designed to: support both an initial pre-sort and the final rank-order sort of the Q statements; allow participants to change their minds at any time during the process; and ensure that all steps in the Q sort process occur in the proper order, and collect other required data elements of the study i.e. consent forms, demographic information, and reflection questions regarding individual item placement. *Qsortonline* is accessible from any computer and is compatible with all current Internet browsers. To use *Qsortonline*, participants access the Internet site via a secure web link. The *Qsortonline* application then loads into the participant's browser and leads the participant through the following steps of the Q methodology research process:

1. An introduction that explains the study and process.
2. The first-order sort of the Q set into 'agree', 'neutral' and 'disagree categories.
3. The rank-ordering of each of the statements into the Q grid.

At the end of the sorting process, participants are asked to complete some demographic questions and provide written responses as to why they had chosen the 2 statements they chose for the 'most disagree' and 'most agree' slots in order to better inform the researchers' interpretations of the results. Once a participant completes the Q sort, the server collects all data which is stored in a secure gateway where the researcher can access information which is provided on an Excel spreadsheet and imported into an appropriate analysis package. Figure 2 shows the first page educators see upon opening the webpage. This page explains the purpose of the research.

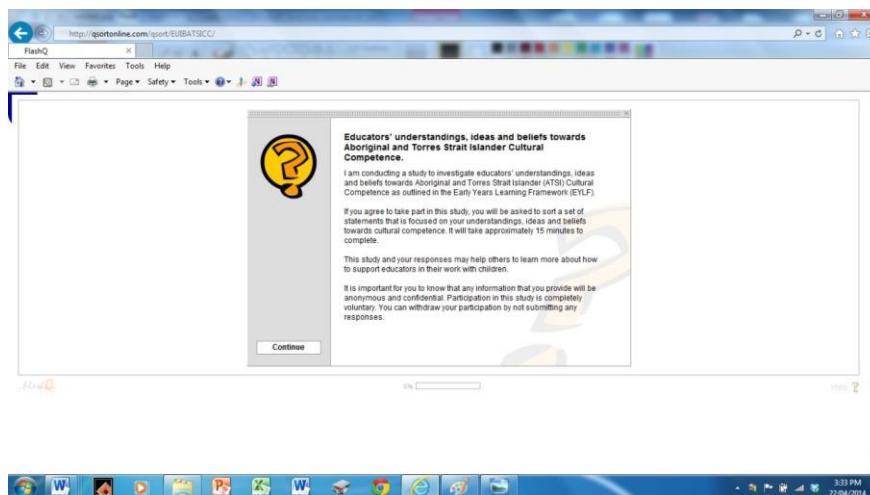


**Figure 2: First page of Q sort**

Once participants access the webpage they are given information about the purpose of the study. When a participant ‘clicks’ the ‘next’ button they are taken to a page to give consent. Once a participant has read all the information pertaining to consent, they have the option of clicking a radio button 'I agree' to continue with the study. This is a vital aspect of the online Q sort software program as consent needs to be made explicit to participants. The main crucial element of any type of internet survey is informed consent. Informed consent implies that two requirements have been met: first, research participants have been informed about the essential elements of the research and have understood the information, and second, they have given their consent to participate. In many surveys, participation itself is taken as an adequate indication of consent. Internet surveys such as the online Q sort makes meeting this requirement easier by allowing respondents to check a radio box indicating consent.

Participants are instructed to familiarise themselves with the 34 statements and then to first-order sort the Q set into ‘agree’, ‘neutral’ and ‘disagree’ categories relevant to their understandings, ideas and beliefs concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.

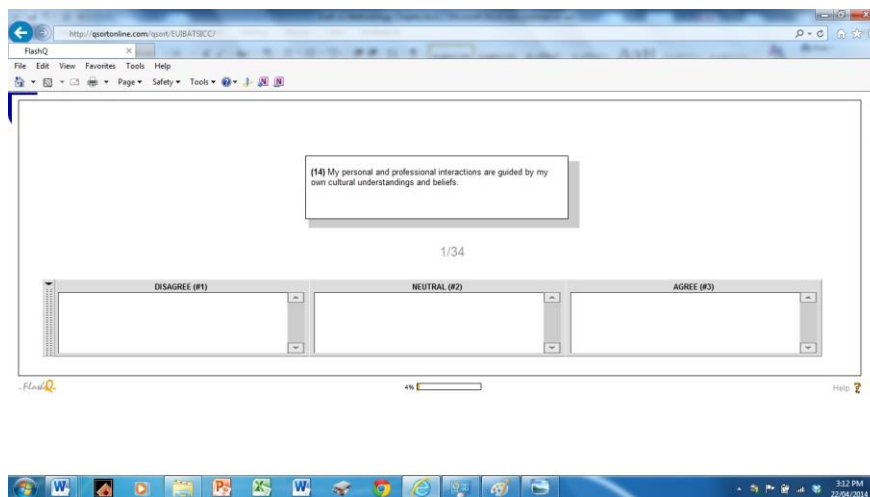


**Figure 3: Sorting between piles**

Statements that hold little importance for the participant are recorded on the midpoint of the grid. Figure 4 shows how responses were recorded on a grid with nine columns with headings ranging from -4 (least characteristic statements) on the left side to +4 (most characteristic statements). All the statements can be moved and exchanged until the participant is completely satisfied with his or her choice. When sorting was completed each participant was asked to re-examine the entire array of statements and rearrange them if they wished. The ranking of statements in Q methodology allowed participants to determine what is meaningful, valuable and significant from their perspective. Newman and Ramlo (2010, p. 509) also state that the sorting process is intrinsically subjective because participants judge each Q statement relative to the others while placing them into the distribution based on a condition of instruction, both of which are provided by the researcher.

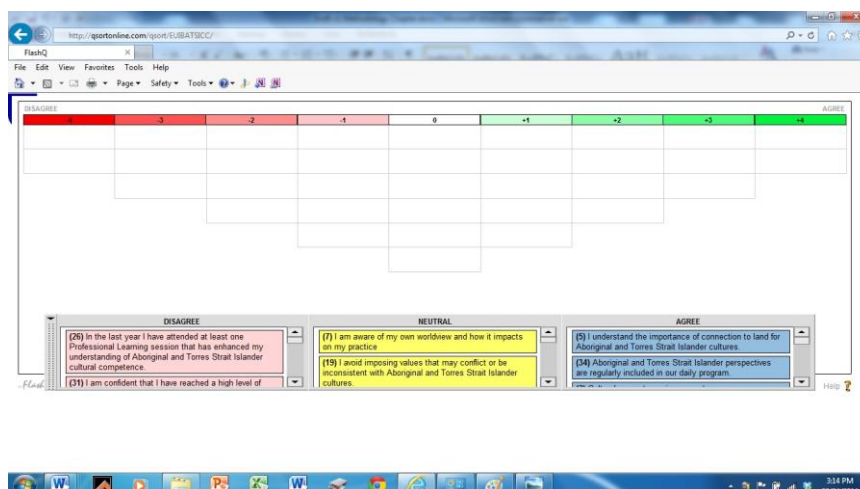


**Figure 4: Q sort grid (2)**

After participants had distributed the 34 statements across the distribution grid, they were then invited to explain their reasons for choosing the statements with which they ‘strongly agreed’ with. These statements were placed at the extreme ends of the grid. Participants were also invited to explain their reasons these statements; ample space was provided in the online Q sort for participants to provide in-depth written responses. The next section describes briefly the value of using Q methodology in early years research. Several studies are highlighted to illustrate how Q methodology has been utilised as a method to explore educators’ understanding of a topic in more depth.

### ***3.4.2 Value of Q methodology in early years research***

Q methodology is ‘a strategy linking qualitative and quantitative analyses’ (McKeown & Thomas 1988, p. 36). The Q method includes an association with quantitative studies ‘because of its reliance on factor analysis’ and qualitative studies ‘because of its subjectivity’ (Brown M 2004, p. 1). The current study includes the incorporation of complex issues that are integral to the purpose of this study and argues that an exploration of educators’ perceptions of cultural competence may bring about patterns of understandings which could result in greater insights and social change to better inform pedagogical practices.

The idea of multiple realities affecting educators’ understandings, ideas, and beliefs is complex, multifaceted and debatable with no right or wrong answers. Q methodology serves to explore highly complex perceptions as viewed by the group of participants. Barata (2007, p. 203) concurs that ‘Q allows for a social constructionist understanding of the world that can entertain diverse and nonlinear perspectives on the same issue ... and efficiently and meaningfully summarize large amounts of data’. A review of the research advocates Q methodology as an appropriate and relevant means of exploring perspectives and opinions (McKeown & Thomas 1988; Dryzek & Holmes 2002; Coogan & Herrington 2011; Shemmings 2006). There have been numerous studies in the Education field that used Q methodology to establish educators’ viewpoints towards different topics. Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2004) use Q methodology in their study to investigate educators’ attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. They argue that the use of attitudinal scales, surveys and questionnaires limits researchers’ ability to explore the subjectivity involved in educators’ attitudes. In their study, the concourse of statements used for the Q sort was drawn from the relevant literature on inclusion. The findings of the study indicate that there were some differences between the attitudes of teachers and their pedagogical practices in relation to inclusion. Ernest (2011) uses Q methodology as a mixed methods

approach to explore the beliefs of a group of educators about developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education. He also concurs the appropriateness of Q methodology as a method to explore the inherent subjectivity of educators' educational values, beliefs and opinions.

Janson, Guillot and Rainey (2007) investigated the attitudes of school counsellors towards working with students with disabilities. Janson, Guillot and Rainey (2007, p. 75) maintain that Q methodology was chosen as the methodological approach for their study because it was the preferred method to identify the range of viewpoints held about a particular issue. Indigenous Maori scholar Sheed (2014) used Q methodology in her research in the study of Maori political attitudes in New Zealand. Sheed (2014, p. 40) asserts that in her study, Q methodology fit well with Indigenous research methodologies, more specifically a Kaupapa Maori research approach. Q methodology is deemed to be an appropriate method as it is designed to facilitate the expression of personal viewpoints (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 53). It asks participants to decide what is 'meaningful and hence what does (and does not) have value and significance from their perspective' (Watts & Stenner 2005, p. 76). The use of Q methodology is a unique quantitative-qualitative method that has potential to challenge the epistemic hierarchy of Eurocentric methods and is also 'operating for, and in, Indigenous interests' (Walter & Anderson 2013, p. 100).

Cross (2005) places substantial confidence in the reasoning of why Q methodology should be used rather than alternative approaches to illicit perspectives and opinions. Q methodology is a method for exploring perceptions or patterns of thought within individuals and among groups. It is a method that can help to capture and reflect the richness and complexity of various points of view. This is achieved through the Q sort technique of Q methodology which conventionally involves the rank-ordering of a set of statements from disagree to agree, thus highlighting perspectives and viewpoints (Cross 2005, p. 209). It was ascertained for this study that Q methodology was a reliable method to explore educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence and ultimately its value in early childhood education.

### **Considerations of Q methodology**

As in any research method, there are limitations to the use of Q methodology. One of the main limitations is that the sorting process can be time-consuming (McKeown & Thomas 1988, p. 34). VanExel and deGraaf (2009, p. 59) provide some limitations to the use of Q methodology. They suggest that some researchers use different structures to compose Q

sets leading to differing Q sets from the same set of possible statements (concourse). Many Q methodologists, however, do not view this as a concern because, firstly, the structure chosen is only a logical construct used by the investigator; the aim is always to arrive at a Q set that is representative of the wide range of existing perspectives about the topic. Second, irrespective of the structure and what the researcher considers a balanced set of statements, it is the participant that eventually gives meaning to the statements by sorting them. Another criticism of Q methodology is the P set – that is, the number of participants required for Q methodology is generally kept to a minimum, thus a small sample compared to other research methods. In this case, the result from any Q methodology cannot be generalised to the rest of the population and are limited to perceptions only of the sample who participated (Watts & Stenner 2012; Cross 2005).

Cross (2005, p. 211) also suggests that Q methodology can be viewed as a procedure to force opinion. He states that: ‘people can tell a story only if they have the appropriate statements with which to tell it’ (Cross 2005, p. 211). Thus, the concourse development of a Q study involves a careful and methodological review of the things people write and say about the topic in questions to generate a representative sample of Q statements (Cross 2005, p. 212). This limitation was considered with the use of the expert group to assist in the development of the concourse and final statements. Finally, one of the biggest criticisms of Q methodology concerns the fact that there is no clear guidance to the number of factors that should be chosen as the final solution of the analysis of the Q sorts, therefore the results of a Q study can be obscured by the researchers’ personal opinions and values (VanExel & deGraaf 2009, p. 59). This leads then to questions of validity. Validity refers to whether the findings of a study are ‘true’ in the sense that research findings accurately reflect the situation, and ‘certain’ in the sense that research findings are supported by the evidence (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000). It is important to note that Q methodology does not depend on traditional issues of validity because a viewpoint expressed by one individual through the sorting process is just as valid as another expressed viewpoint and cannot be deemed invalid.

### ***3.4.3 Data analysis***

Q methodology is designed so that the Q set (the statements) become the ‘subjects’ and the individual Q sorts (the participants’ viewpoints) become the ‘variables’, therefore it becomes possible to correlate the way in which individual Q sorts cluster together to form similar or shared viewpoints. Therefore, by-person factor analysis highlights patterns between Q sorts by comparing the value of one variable (a Q sort from participant 1, for

example) with the value of another variable (a Q sort from participant 2) for the same Q sort statement (Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009).

The Q sorts were analysed via a software program designed to analyse Q sorts. PQ Method (Schmlock 2014) is a commercial Windows-based DOS program designed to statistically analyse Q data. The analyses of Q sorts involve correlation, factor analysis and the calculation of factor scores (Brown 2008). The by-person factor analysis determines the extent to which individual Q sorts correlate highly with one another and therefore can be considered to resemble, thus be classed, as a 'factor' (Brown 1993). The purpose of factor analysis is to determine the underlying factors from the data, which can summarise the pattern of correlations (Watts and Stenner 2012). The number of factors extracted from the data and the way in which these are interpreted and described is dependent on the researcher's judgement as well as statistical and theoretical processes.

The most subjective part of the entire Q methodological process is in the interpretation of factor arrays. This is also the stage where the researchers own biases and limitations may become apparent and may result in meanings being inadvertently imposed on research participants. When interpreting a factor array, a plausible story becomes apparent about the choices made by the participants to explain the pattern of their rankings. The interpretations will also include a discussion of those items scored in the extreme positions indicative of strong agreement and strong disagreement. This study will present the full factor array and the set of Q sort items to prove the adequacy of the factor interpretation and will be open to evaluation by the reader. This procedure is described in more detail in the next chapter. The next section describes the method of yarning through semi-structured interviews.

### ***3.5 Method 2 – Semi-structured interviews using an Indigenous methodology of yarning***

This section details and describes the method used to collect data in the second phase of this study. This section will bring to the fore Indigenous methodologies as significant methodologies. As noted previously, Indigenous research methodologies draw from Indigenous knowledge systems and the underlying epistemologies of Indigenous peoples (Chilisa 2012). As an Indigenous researcher, I sought to represent aspects of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal epistemologies that therefore required a methodology that was representative of both worldviews and philosophies. In this research, a yarning method was utilised to overcome the limitations of traditional interviews. The aim in using yarning as a research method was to position and legitimize Indigenous knowledge and

methodologies as relevant and significant in the hierarchy of valued knowledges (McConaghy 2000). The following section briefly outlines Indigenous methodologies and yarning as an Indigenist research methodology, followed by discussion on participant sampling, ethical considerations and the limitations related to this phase of the research.

### ***3.5.1 Yarning as an authentic research method***

Merriam (2002, p. 4) affirms that qualitative research is primarily about understanding: ‘researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experience?’ As an Aboriginal researcher, I was interested in educators’ understandings and perspectives around the concept of cultural competence and the associated meaning they hold. Using an Indigenous methodology of yarning as a narrative approach would aid in the journey of making meaning. Narrative approaches such as conversational methods and yarning within a semi-structured interview format allow understanding of participants’ perspectives and viewpoints via stories and recollections (Kovach, 2005). Elliot (2005, p. 29) affirms that through narrative approaches, participants are likely to provide spontaneous descriptions and open up about their experiences. It is grounded in the notion that they make sense of the world through the construction of narratives. Sikes and Gale (2006, p. 1) also value the use of narratives in educational research since:

Human beings are storying creatures that make sense of the world and the things that happen to them by constructing narratives to explain and interpret events both to themselves and to other people. (Sikes & Gale, 2006, p. 1)

In this way meaning is created through the experiences described, through the construction of the story itself, through the telling of the story and through the interpreting of the story. Narrative, including semi-structured interviews, is a personalised construct with embedded values, beliefs and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews using a yarning approach allow for a contextualised and cohesive understanding of educators’ understandings, knowledge and prior experiences. Therefore, a narrative Indigenous methodology approach of yarning is the most logical method to use for this research to enable ‘participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view’ (Cohen et al. 2000, p. 267). It is also conducive to Aboriginal ways of knowing and being (Martin 2003).

It was noted in a previous section that the research design is embedded in a theoretical framework that reflects the researcher’s standpoint. The narrative approach of yarning offers the potential to provide a holistic context that allows individuals to reflect and

reconstruct their personal experiences, understandings and perspectives. There is also growing acknowledgement of the importance of yarning as a research method and has been recommended as an appropriate and respectful way of engaging with Aboriginal people (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Kovach 2010b; Bowes, Kitson & Burns 2010).

Providing a single definition for yarning is precarious because it potentially limits its application within different Aboriginal contexts (Dean 2010). While yarning has been referred to as an 'informal process' (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Geia 2012), to claim that it is informal is not conducive or respectful of Aboriginal ways of doing. Yarning is used in all facets of Aboriginal life, from 'informal' yarning to 'discipline' yarning. Both are entirely different with different purposes but are both grounded in Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing. Additionally, yarning can never happen in isolation and without context – there are requirements. These requirements include respect, reciprocity, trust and understanding all of which underpin Indigenous epistemologies and ways of doing. Geia (2012, p. 15) also asserts that yarns are rarely individual constructs: they carry within them the shared lived experience of their families and communities.

Several Indigenous scholars have utilised yarning as a research methodology. Bessarab (cited in Laycock, Walker, Harrison & Brands 2011, pp. 52–53) used yarning through semi-structured interviews to collect data in an interpretive study about gendered experiences of women and men growing up in their respective families. Williams's (2007) research offers an analysis of the socio-cultural nuances of mainstream education and the cultural position of Aboriginal education. Williams (2007) responded to conventional research methods in his research by creating the concept of 'a telling space as a reflection of our practice of yarning' (Williams 2007, p. 138). This telling space was a space where his research participants could 'share ideas, knowledge, emotion, experiences, concerns and aspirations' (Williams 2007, p. 138). In his research, Phillips (2012) takes a close look at the cultural factors that impact on tertiary education access for Aboriginal men. In his study, he used yarning approaches in his interviews and analysed them using a method of re-storying and retelling.

Many early childhood researchers have responded to the call for Indigenous culturally appropriate methodologies and have used yarning in their approaches. Bowes, Kitson and Burns (2010) utilised a yarning methodology with Aboriginal families who talked about their experiences of early childhood education. They advocated for the use of a research method that was appropriate and would engage families so that 'their voices could be heard

authentically' (Bowes et al. 2010, p. 2) and that privileged Indigenous knowledges. Facilitated by Aboriginal field researchers, Bowes, Kitson and Burns (2010) argued that the 'richness and authenticity of the families' contributions in this project were linked to the accessible and non-threatening use of yarning as a methodology'. Fluckiger, Diamond and Jones's (2012) research was based in a remote preschool setting in Australia and focussed on the links between effective partnership between parents, teacher and the community and young Aboriginal children's literacy development. Data was collected using a variety of methods including direct observation, field notes and interviews. To gather parents' and communities' understandings on effective partnerships, yarning was used. In other research, Power (2004) explored 'yarning' as a means of building partnerships between feminist and Aboriginal leaders in early childhood education. In discussing the benefits of yarning, Power (2004) described how initially she had difficulty understanding the anecdotal ways that her Aboriginal colleagues responded to questions through stories. Power (2004, p. 40) eventually realised that she 'had to turn down the volume of "white noise"', which were represented by her preconceptions and values. Power (2004, p. 37) demonstrated in her research that using the method of yarning created a culturally appropriate way for the researcher to listen to the voices of Aboriginal participants.

Yarning as a research method has also been used in the health field. Walker, Fredericks, Mills and Anderson (2013) explored yarning as a method for understanding health and wellness from the perspective of Aboriginal women. In their research, they moved between the different yarning types as identified by Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010). The first is 'social' yarning which has been defined as a type of conversation where a connection is developed and relationships are strengthened. Social yarns include sharing of gossip, news, funny stories, advice and whatever information both parties choose to share (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 40). The second type of yarn described by Bessarab is the 'collaborative' yarn. This type of yarn occurs 'between two or more people when they are sharing information or a discussion about ideas' (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 40). The third type of yarn is the 'research topic' yarn. This type of yarn takes place in a semi structured interview (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p. 40). The sole purpose of this type of yarn is to 'gather information through participants' stories that are related to the research topic'. The fourth type of yarn is the 'therapeutic' yarn. This is a type of yarn where more often than not traumatic stories are shared that are highly emotional and personal (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, pp. 40–41). Walker et al. (2013) contend that irrespective of which type of yarning used, yarning helps facilitate in-depth discussion that result in thick descriptions

(Bessabara & Ng'andu 2010). Walker et al. (2013) also identified two other forms of yarning – family yarning and cross-cultural yarning. Family yarning was identified in their study as a yarn about family connections. Cross-cultural yarning was identified in their study as involving the display of certain communication and interaction protocols between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from an Indigenous and Western standpoint (Bessabara & Ng'andu 2010; Walker et al. 2013).

The method of yarning used in the above studies has led to more consideration given to the utilisation of Indigenous methodologies and methods which are culturally respectful, honour oral traditions, ensure cultural safety and engage holistically (Dean 2010, Kovach 2010b). These examples have also highlighted how utilising an Indigenous research methodology of yarning allows participants to 'talk freely about their experiences, thoughts and ideas' (Walker et al. 2013, p. 3). Yarning also allows participants to express their perspectives and contribute to the research in their own way and voices (Dean 2010, p. 5). Likewise, yarning with non-Aboriginal participants has the potential to bring non-Aboriginal people into an intercultural space that is respectful and reciprocal. The full potential of yarning is not yet recognised as a legitimate research method. And yet as an emerging method in research, it has the potential to shape contemporary research discourse (Geia 2012, p. 13).

As I was moving through my journey of considering the most appropriate method in data collection to utilise, I was mindful of my position and my accountability to my cultural ways of being and doing. It became apparent while reviewing the literature that this is common for many Aboriginal researchers. One particularly powerful example by Geia (2012) resonated with me from her thesis, 'First steps, making footprints: intergenerational Palm Island families' Indigenous stories (narratives) of childrearing practice strengths'. In the chapter, 'Can't we just yarn?', Geia (2012) also explains her struggle with undertaking academic research and being a Murri.<sup>10</sup> Geia (2012) expounds on her feelings during one of her 'interviews'. Geia states:

semi-structured questions were firmly imprinted on my mind ready to be unleashed. Suddenly my whole train of thought and preparation seemed like it was out the door before it got a chance to come in ... I felt exposed that my actions were being scrutinised by my peers. There was this sense of tentativeness in the air as I saw the unseen statement in their eyes, 'you are one of us (a Murri) but you are acting like one of them (academic researchers)'. That nonverbal message catalysed an internal wrestling within me that has continued to provoke constant self-examination and internal questioning: "Who am I in this study and where do I fit in community and academia?" (Geia 2012, pp. 58–59)

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10 Murri - is the term used for Aboriginal people born and/or living in the State of Queensland, Australia.

The example provided by Geia (2012) contrasts with the points highlighted previously by Walker et al. (2013) in relation to cross-cultural yarning. This highlights that Indigenous researchers and Indigenous participants often must adapt to westernised rules and protocols (Walker et al. 2013, p. 7). Examples include non-Indigenous protocols of handshaking and asking direct questions, and Indigenous protocols of sharing place and connection to country. Regardless of these perceived constraints and/or protocols, I felt confident that I would be able to weave together the Indigenous practice of yarning with the formal obligations of Western research. I also felt assured that utilising yarning as a research methodology was ‘an appropriate response to de-legitimise racist oppression in research and shift to a more empowering and self-determining outcome’ (Rigney 1999, p. 110).

One important aspect of qualitative research is the fact that we as researchers are entering others’ lives; therefore, if ‘we undertake to study human lives, we have to be ready to face human feelings’ (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz 1991, p. 49). Understanding the role of listening in a research context is imperative for any researcher to be mindful of as listening is a key role in the research process. Addressing the process of and importance of yarning also requires consideration of the importance of listening: listening not just with the ears, but with all senses (Rinaldi 2006, p.65). For me a ‘pedagogy of listening’ (Rinaldi 2006) when conducting research is vital to ‘hear’ the voices, as listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. I concur that a pedagogy of listening is not only a pedagogy for school and teaching and learning; it is a stance for life. Creating a context to ‘listen’ to the voices wholeheartedly is important. Listening is an ongoing process that encourages reflection, welcoming and openness towards oneself and others. Rinaldi (2013) emphasises that behind the act of listening there is a curiosity, a desire and an uncertainty to share knowledge and be open to possibilities. These reasons resonate for me as there was a desire to open my mind to new perspectives and new ways of thinking.

Using an Indigenous research methodology of yarning connects with my values and beliefs as an Aboriginal person that acknowledges and respects our ways of knowing and doing. It also ensures that any Aboriginal participants have opportunity to express their perspectives in their own ways and in a culturally safe manner. In this way, Indigenous knowledge systems, ways of doing, perspectives and participation is reflected in the research process (Dean 2010, p. 6). Yarning is of significance to Indigenous people because story-telling is grounded in our ways of doing: we yarn because it’s our way of being that ‘honours orality as means of transmitting knowledge’ (Kovach 2010a, p. 41).

### **3.5.2 Researcher's role – *Kungun* again?**

With respect to listening, it is important to acknowledge that along with yarning comes the act of listening. In this research, I needed to ensure that, although I like to have a good yarn, that I talk less and listen more. This is affirmed by Given (2008) who contends that the researcher's role is to focus entirely on the speaker. This can be done verbally and non-verbally as active listening involves being receptive to different aspects of communication including body language, speaking style, tone, silences and emotions (Given 2008). If opportunity arises to explore further the participants' understandings, then the researcher should ask clarifying questions. In this way, the researcher shows interest in what the participant is saying. Listening is an active verb that involves giving meaning and worth to the perspectives of others (Rinaldi 2011, p. 236). Listening is also about exploration, not interrogation. It means being open to differences in opinions and perspectives and recognising another's point of view respectfully. Rinaldi (2006, p. 65) provides a succinct description of listening as:

sensitivity to the patterns that connect, to that which connects us to others; abandoning ourselves to the conviction that our understanding and our own being are but small parts of a broader, integrated knowledge that holds the universe together. Listening, then, as a metaphor for having the openness and sensitivity to listen and be listened to – listening not just with our ears, but with all our senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, orientation).

Therefore, a semi-structured format was used to enable specific information to be elicited from participants with the researcher asking clarifying questions if required. The purpose of semi-structured interviews utilising yarning was to 'find out what is on their mind; what they think, or how they feel about something' (Fraenkel & Wallen 2003, p. 455). Semi-structured interviews have been described by Arskey and Knight (1999, p. 96) as a 'data gathering technique, designed to obtain information about people's views, opinion, ideas and experiences'. The primary aim of the yarns using a semi-structured interview format was to explore early years educators' understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence. To achieve this, I followed Creswell's (2009) suggestion while planning the yarns. Creswell (2009) recommends that an interview only be conducted if it is going to elicit the type of useful information the researcher is seeking using an interview protocol of open-ended questions. A list of the questions generated for this study was based on the literature around cultural competence particularly in relation to the Early Years Learning Framework (see section 1.4). The next section explains how purposive sampling was used to select participants for the semi-structured interviews.

### **3.5.3 Sampling**

Purposive sampling involves selecting participants ‘based on a specific purpose rather than randomly’ (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003, p. 713). Further to this definition, Maxwell (1997 p. 87) defines purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which ‘particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices’. The researcher sought rich detailed expressive information from a small number of participants who work in the area of early childhood education; therefore, purposive sampling was used. Teddlie and Taskakkori (2009) outline four main characteristics of purposive sampling which informed the sampling process:

- Purposive sampling addresses specific purposes related to the research questions and cases are selected that are information rich in relation to those questions.
- Purposive samples can be selected using the ‘expert judgement’ of researchers.
- Purposive sampling procedures focus on the depth of information that can be provided and generated by individual participants.
- Purposive samples are small, less than 30, but are dependent on the type of research being conducted.

(Teddlie & Taskakkori 2009, pp. 173–174)

In this phase of the study, purposeful sampling was used to deliberately select participants to provide information relevant to the research questions. The participants who were purposefully selected for this study were required to be early childhood teachers.

In relation to the semi-structured interviews, an email was sent to all early years educators similar to the process used in the recruitment of participants for the Q Sort. An email inviting potential participants was sent to a total of 367 early years sites. Interested participants returned written interest via email with suggested dates and times to meet. The semi-structured interviews occurred over several weeks at various locations. For instance, one participant was happy to meet in the staffroom located at her workplace after hours while another participant was eager to meet at a shopping centre for morning tea. Each participant chose the setting. At the time of meeting, the participants were provided with a copy of the Participant information sheet and a Consent form. Time was also allowed for each participant to read through the information sheet and consent form and ask questions. The verbal explanation of the study and the written information provided the participants with background information on the study and details on how data was to be stored. Written consent was received from all 9 participants. The participants were considered in all aspects of the research design and the researcher ensured that their needs and privacy were adhered to. Participants were assured that their transcripts would be stored on a

password protected USB and laptop that only the researcher had access to. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identity; also, identifying information such as the preschool site and other identifying information was omitted to secure confidentiality. Furthermore, each yarn was digitally recorded and transcribed for participant checking. Of the 9 participants, 8 provided approval and/or feedback comprised of additional information such as correct spelling or restructuring of their sentence.

### ***3.6 Limitations***

There are several limitations which need to be acknowledged. Conducting the research as an Aboriginal researcher means that the data and results are potentially exposed to a certain level of bias. On the other hand, my knowledge as an Aboriginal person and my previous experiences as an early years educator may have also provided additional understanding. Several measures were implemented to ensure researcher bias was minimised. As noted above, the online Q sort was undertaken by participants without any influence from the researcher. The Q data was analysed using PQMethod software (Schmlock, 2014) according to the instructions provided by Watts and Stenner (2012) which minimised researcher subjectivity influencing the results. For the semi-structured interviews, each transcript was returned to all participants for member checking and verification to ensure that it was representative of their voices and perspectives. Measures such as those mentioned above were implemented to ensure that data was valid.

The relatively small sample size of nine participants that partook in the semi-structured interviews also needs to be acknowledged as a limitation. A small sample means that the results from this study are not generalizable across the population of early childhood educators. Nor could the results be generalised to speak on behalf of or represent all early years educators. However, although the number of participants is small, the methodological approaches allow for close examination of educators' perceptions and understandings of cultural competence. Therefore, although the results cannot make broad generalisations, they can locate the available discourse of cultural competence in the early years of education at the current time. The next section highlights how both methods were converged into an Indigenous methodological frame.

### ***3.7 Converging methods into an Indigenous methodological frame***

It may appear to be contradictory to use aspects of Western-based methodologies in this research after I have clearly articulated the importance of using Indigenous methodologies and methods. It is also acknowledged that quantitative research methods have created for

Aboriginal people a 'mistrust in the ability of quantitative research to accurately capture the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' (Bodkin-Andrews & Craven 2013, p. 167). This has contributed to the history of 'exclusionary practices' (Walter 2010, p. 46) and is demonstrated in the review of the literature. An example is the adept use of NAPLAN standardised testing where the 'disparity in educational outcomes of Aboriginal students has come to be viewed as 'normal' and incremental change as acceptable' (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) 2006, p. 16). The use of mixed methods was viewed as necessary to meet the aims of the research. Limitations were noted throughout the research journey. Q methodology as a quantitative-qualitative research method was integrated into an Indigenous standpoint methodology (Walter & Anderson 2013, p. 82). This research does not operate in a manner that further marginalises Aboriginal peoples. Following Walter and Anderson's (2013) suggestion of using quantitative methods through an Indigenous lens, the following points drove the research:

- Q methodology privileges Aboriginal voices, knowledge and understandings through the development of the statements used in the concourse (see section 3.4).
- Q methodology does not take Eurocentric value systems as the unacknowledged norm.
- Q methodology does not work from a starting point of 'deficit'.
- Q methodology benefits Aboriginal education more specifically to bridge the gap between the literature on cultural competence and early years educators' understandings of cultural competence.

Through this process, Aboriginal participants were given opportunity to comment and express their opinions and viewpoints about what constitutes cultural competence in the early years of education. This ensured that Indigenous voices were central to the study, thereby 'challenging colonizer settler quantitative practises' (Walter & Anderson 2013, p. 76). Overall, the four points outlined above demonstrate how a quantitative method can be utilised and expressed into an Indigenous methodological frame (Walter & Anderson 2013). Furthermore, a mixed methods approach and 'way of thinking seeks not so much convergence as insight ... of important understandings and discernments through the juxtaposition of different lenses, perspectives, and stances' (Greene 2005, p. 208).

When I began reflecting on the research design, I considered that the research methodology needed to ensure that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal voices could be heard. I needed

to use methods that would create an intercultural space. An intercultural space has been described by Taylor (2003) as:

[t]he meeting of two distinct cultures through processes and interactions which retain the distinctive integrity and difference of both cultures and which may involve a blending of elements of both cultures but never the domination of one over another. (Taylor 2003, p. 45)

A semi-structured interview through an Indigenous methodology of yarning was considered appropriate. Carla Rinaldi (2006, p. 65) provides a wonderful metaphor for my point:

If you believe that others are a source of your learning, your identity and your knowledge, you have opened a very important door to the joy of being together. We are not separated by our differences but connected by our differences. It is because of my difference that I am useful to you because I offer another perspective.

Yarning through a semi-structured interview format was conducive to the aims of this research. Yarning has been described as ‘a transactional activity that involves negotiation and trust’ (Imtoul, Kameniar & Bradley 2009, p. 27). When we, as in Aboriginal people, get together, conversation is represented through yarning. This yarning usually begins with yarning about family; about culture and about country. Yarning almost always begins with a relational question such as ‘Where you from?’ This places Aboriginal people within context and community. This is the cultural way of starting a yarn. Thus, a narrative approach of yarning through semi structured interview was used to enable all voices to be equally heard and represented and is a culturally safe method for potential Aboriginal participants.

The recognition of yarning as a research method in Australia is gaining momentum in education and social sciences (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Dean 2010). It has wide-ranging possibilities to shape contemporary research discourse making research more meaningful for Indigenous researchers. Yarning is an important method of transferring knowledge in Aboriginal cultures. So too is listening: in my Ngarrindjeri language, we refer to the act of listening as ‘kungun’. Quite often I will hear a family member say ‘kungun Uncle Joe there’, and this is when you want to listen, ‘kungun’, to what is being said, talked about, yarned about. During my postgraduate research time, I had opportunity to share my beliefs and values around yarning to a group of Higher Degree Research (HDR) students when we collaboratively developed a piece of writing around yarning and storytelling. I began my section by telling a story, although brief, as a springboard to explore critical issues related to identity and belonging. As affirmed by Salili and Hoosain (2010, p. 355), critical

storytelling begins by ‘deconstructing identity, makes connections with community, and ultimately informs a pedagogy of possibilities’. I began my story as follows:

*I am someone who enjoys listening to people yarning and yarning with them. As a young girl, I enjoyed sitting with my elders listening to them yarn. One of my earliest memories was of listening to a couple of my old Aunties sitting together yarning as they made flowers out of feathers and weaving baskets using rushes – I would be there taking it all in watching and listening to the exchange back and forth as they yarned, about family, kinship, and Ruwe (country). These yarns were not linear or stagnant, they quite often were loud and at times silences prevailed, but onward the yarn progressed as memories were recalled. If I wasn't meant to hear the yarn I would often hear one of my Aunties say 'Tau Yanun' which in Ngarrindjeri language means 'stop talking'. This was when I knew there was something really important to hear!*

In the narrative above I was not just addressing the process of and importance of yarning, but I was also addressing the importance of listening: listening not just with my ears, but with all my senses (Rinaldi 2006, p. 65). For me a pedagogy of listening when conducting research is vital to ‘hear’ the voices; as listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. Rinaldi (2006) emphasises the fact that just as we as educators listen to children’s theories and how they both question and develop a relationship with reality, we all search for meaning and understanding through listening to ‘voices’. A pedagogy of listening - as educators and as researchers - underpins a pedagogy of relationships.

A pedagogy of listening to the ‘voices’ of my fellow Aboriginal research participants and my non-Aboriginal colleagues through the process of yarning is important to me as an Aboriginal researcher as ‘research is not just something that’s out there: it’s something that you’re building for yourself and for your community’ (Wilson 2001, p. 179). Interview questions were designed to learn about educators’ understandings and perspectives towards cultural competence and what might have influenced their perceptions or experiences to enable new knowledge and possibilities. It is also important to acknowledge that yarning transcripts are examples of ‘discourses’ that do not necessarily yield the ‘truth’ of what educators experience of cultural competence. Rather, their yarns serve to highlight the resources educators have available to them to draw on and the ways they locate themselves as culturally competent.

### ***3.8 Ethical considerations***

Procedures throughout the study have been guided by protocols as outlined in ethics applications to both the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department for Education and Children's Services Ethical Conduct Unit. Once approval was gained, the researcher contacted potential participants via email. Participants were informed of the study via email where I briefly outlined the nature of the research and the purpose of it. Participants were assured that all information would be held in the strictest of confidence; pseudonyms would be used in transcriptions and that they could withdraw at any time.

One of the ethical considerations was the previous relationships I held with a few of the participants as colleagues in the various roles I have undertaken in my career in education. I acknowledged the trust each participant was placing in me and respected their decisions to participate in the study. I also respected the decision made by a small number of participants in the semi-structured interviews who did not want small sections of their transcripts recorded and stored due to the sensitive information shared. Ensuring the confidentiality of responses was of a high priority to the researcher.

### ***3.9 Conclusion***

This chapter has described the methods used in this investigation based on my worldview and my ways of knowing and being. This influenced the choice of research topic, the choice of research paradigm to guide the study and the choice of data-gathering and methods of analysis. Following the advice of Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Maggie Walter (2009), I applied my own lens, perspective and understanding to the research. I also drew on aspects of place which helped me to come to know and locate my epistemological stance from my own perspective and for my own purpose. This chapter also highlighted how I meandered in and out, interpreting and reflecting on theories and paradigms. I realised that not everything can be known. Drawing on my Ngarrindjeri worldview, I felt comfortable in a space which was not comfortable but innovative and inspiring as I searched for meaning. It is important to acknowledge that I do not claim to have authority over all things Ngarrindjeri. But I am articulating what is important for me as an individual Ngarrindjeri person, educator and researcher.

In summary, this chapter has demonstrated that implementing a mixed methods research design would allow for the generation of rich data in a relatively unexplored area and the inclusion of Indigenous methodologies. It has been demonstrated that the use of hybridised

research methods can combine both Indigenous and Western praxis that honours and respects the voices intrinsic to everyone. This is an important component of an Indigenist research methodology. The strength of converging Indigenous and Western methods, in the words of critical race theorists, allows for counter-stories and also casts doubt on dominant discourses. Doubt that leads to a discovery of theories that can work to empower Aboriginal peoples to delve deeper into equity issues. A summary of the main findings is provided in the next two chapters.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Findings from Q methodology**

### ***4.1 Introduction***

The previous chapter demonstrated that the use of hybridised research methods can combine both Indigenous and Western praxis and honour and respect the voices intrinsic to

everyone. It has also been established that; a) Q methodology as a quantitative-qualitative method can be conceptualised as an Indigenous quantitative methodology that although based on Western principles can be guided by Indigenous research principles; and b) yarning though semi-structured interviews can be utilised to initiate dialogue about cultural competence where participants are actively involved in the meaning making process. In this chapter, I will present the findings of the Q methodology.

## ***4.2 Q Methodology***

Q methodology integrates both qualitative and quantitative techniques to reveal social perspectives (Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009, p. 10). As noted previously, the researcher's task is to seek out the patterns in individuals' Q sorts to reveal collective perspectives. This chapter outlines how a two-factor solution was chosen based on three sets of statistical procedures: correlation matrix; varimax rotation; and factor loadings (Brown M 2004, p. 6). Q methodology evaluates participants' Q sorts using factor analysis to identify shared and distinct points of view or perspectives. PQMethod (version 2.35; Schmlock 2014) was the software used to analyse the 18 Q sorts in this study. PQ method correlates the Q sorts (people who conduct the sort) rather than the statements themselves. In this way, it is the Q sorts that are the dependant variables and the statements are the independent variables (Watts & Stenner 2012; Kamal & Grodzinska-Jurczak 2014, p. 2692). In Q methodology, the participants are the variables that contribute to the creation of factors, not the items in the Q set (statements). This section will demonstrate the use of Q methodology to extract factors.

### ***4.2.1 Participant demographics***

As noted in section 3.4, the focus of Q methodology in this research was to explore the various types of perspectives within a given population. In this study, 18 early childhood educators participated in this part of the data collection. 13 participants identified as female, two as male and three participants chose not to disclose gender. Self-disclosed age of participants ranged from 31–50+ years, with three participants in their 30s, four participants in their 40s and seven participants in their 50s. Four participants did not disclose age on the demographic data survey.

Participant's self-disclosed cultural backgrounds included: seven Anglo Australians; one British/German; one Italian; one English/Irish; one European; one participant identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and seven participants did not respond to this question. Participants also self-disclosed their educational background as follows - 2 Diplomas in

Education, eleven Degrees in Education, 1 Masters and 4 chose not to respond to the question. Most participants have been teaching for over 10 years.

|    | Gender | Age group | Cultural background | Level of education | Years teaching | Attendance at cultural competence professional learning | Hours of professional learning |
|----|--------|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1  | F      | 50+       | English             | Masters            | 3 to 5         | N                                                       | -                              |
| 2  | F      | 41-50     | Australian          | Degree             | 10 +           | Y                                                       | 10 hours                       |
| 3  | F      | 31-40     | -                   | Degree             | 6 to 9         | N                                                       | -                              |
| 4  | F      | 41-50     | Australian          | Degree             | 10 +           | Y                                                       | -                              |
| 5  | F      | 31-40     | Australian          | Degree             | 10 +           | Y                                                       | 3 hours                        |
| 6  | F      | 31-40     | Australian          | Degree             | 10 +           | Y                                                       | 1 day                          |
| 7  | M      | 50+       | European            | Degree             | 10 +           | N                                                       | -                              |
| 8  | F      | 50+       | -                   | Degree             | 10 +           | Y                                                       | 6 hours                        |
| 9  | M      | -         | -                   | -                  | -              | -                                                       | -                              |
| 10 | F      | 50+       | Australian          | Degree             | 10 +           | Y                                                       | 10 hours                       |
| 11 | -      | -         | -                   | -                  | -              | -                                                       | -                              |
| 12 | F      | 41-50     | European            | Degree             | 10 +           | Y                                                       | A semester university          |
| 13 | -      | -         | -                   | -                  | -              | -                                                       | -                              |
| 14 | F      | 50+       | English             | Degree             | 10 +           | N                                                       | -                              |
| 15 | -      | -         | -                   | -                  | -              | -                                                       | -                              |
| 16 | F      | 50+       | Aboriginal          | Diploma            | 10 +           | Y                                                       | 8 hours                        |
| 17 | F      | 31-40     | Australian          | Degree             | 6 to 9         | N                                                       | -                              |
| 18 | F      | 41-50     | -                   | Diploma            | 3 to 5         | N                                                       | -                              |

**Table 4: Q methodology participant demographics**

Participants were asked to indicate if they had undertaken professional learning in cultural competence. The average was 10 hours and lowest 3 hours. The participant's demographics provides a snapshot of the diversity of participants who undertook the Q sort process. Table

4 will provide useful when analysing the data. The next section describes the procedures and methods followed to analyse the Q data.

#### **4.2.2 The Q sorts**

In this phase of the study, 18 participants sorted 34 statements into a quasi-normalised grid (see Figure 4) per their agreement or disagreement with a statement to determine the strength of feeling towards the statement. In Q methodology, participants are regarded as the variables and the items (the Q set) as cases (Stenner, Watts & Worrell 2010, p. 224). As a method, it works to isolate a range of viewpoints that are shared by a few individuals through factor analysis. In Q methodology, the researcher's role is to interpret the Q sorts and develop a narrative that describes each of the identified perspectives (Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009). Interpretive in nature, the narratives or 'summarizing accounts' (Stenner, Watts & Worrell 2010, p. 227) explain the viewpoint being expressed by a particular factor. For this research, identifying factors related to educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence was the aim of the research.

This research used the same chronological approach to generating a Q methodological factor analysis using PQMethod as advocated by Watts and Stenner (2012). Factor analysis in Q methodology provides the researcher factors resulting from statistical computations of Q sorts. The Q sorts undergo an inverted factor analysis using PQMethod (version 2.35) (Schmlock 2014). PQMethod produces output files that provide the researcher with an overview of the factors that include:

- correlations between factor scores
- the factor matrix
- the normalised factor scores for each factor
- the descending array of difference between factors and
- the distinguishing statements and consensus statements for each factor.

I will briefly outline the steps involved in using the software. Figure 5 below shows the main menu within the PQMethod program. The first step is to input all the statements. In this case, I entered into the program each of the 34 individual statements. The next step involved the program asking the researcher to enter the shape of the distribution grid, that is, the values of the end columns. This study utilised a distribution grid with a range from -4 and +4 (See Figure 4).

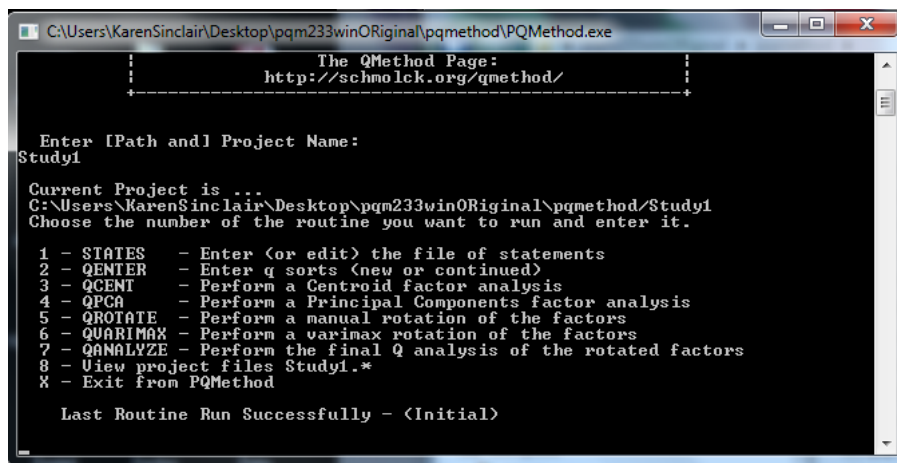


**Figure 5: Main menu in PQMethod**

The first task is to then enter each individual Q sort. I chose to use pseudonyms so as not to identify any participant. This task was very repetitive and required careful input to avoid jeopardising the data although the PQMethod software has capabilities to alert the user to any missed statements not entered within each Q sort. Figure 6 below shows an example of one of the completed Q sorts highlighting the distribution grid.

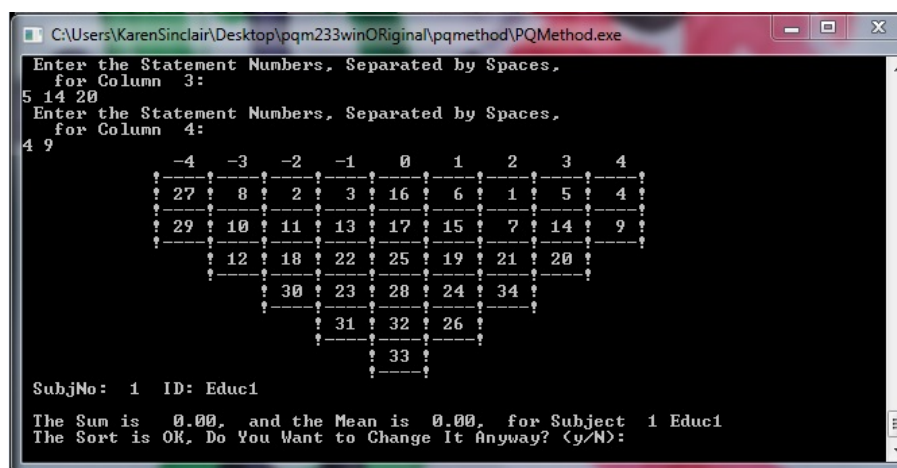


**Figure 6: An example of one of the Q sorts entered into the PQMethod program.**

Figure 6 above highlights this participant's choice of positioning the statements in the grid. It can be seen that statement four and statement nine were positioned in column four indicating strong agreement with said statements. In comparison, statement 27 and statement 29 were positioned in column -4 to indicate strong disagreement with the statements.

Once the statements from each Q sort are entered into the PQMethod program, the program automatically calculates the correlation matrix. This matrix displays how each sorter correlated with every other sorter. This is reiterated by Watts and Stenner (2012) who

emphasise that the correlation matrix simply reflects the nature and extent of the relationships of each Q sort with every other Q sort in the study (Watts & Stenner 2012). Van Exel and De Graaf (2005, p. 10) highlight that the correlation matrix represents, ‘the level of disagreement between the individual sorts, that is, the degree of dissimilarity in points of view between the individual q-sorters is calculated’ (Van Exel & De Graaf 2005, p. 10). Ultimately, this means that the correlation matrix identifies the relationship of each Q sort with every other Q sort in the study. Table 5 shows the correlation matrix generated, which allows the interrelatedness of Q sorts to be examined rigorously.

| Correlation Matrix Between Sorts |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| SORTS                            | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17  | 18  |
| 1 Educ1                          | 100 | 62  | 54  | 55  | 47  | 49  | 40  | 49  | 51  | 54  | 52  | 62  | 78  | 72  | 68  | 67  | 68  | 56  |
| 2 Educ2                          | 62  | 100 | 50  | 49  | 51  | 61  | 29  | 57  | 41  | 64  | 57  | 61  | 44  | 57  | 31  | 35  | 52  | 40  |
| 3 Educ3                          | 54  | 50  | 100 | 60  | 34  | 62  | 41  | 53  | 63  | 42  | 56  | 71  | 47  | 56  | 32  | 33  | 44  | 51  |
| 4 Educ4                          | 55  | 49  | 60  | 100 | 31  | 70  | 41  | 52  | 56  | 62  | 56  | 64  | 54  | 57  | 53  | 50  | 53  | 44  |
| 5 Educ5                          | 47  | 51  | 34  | 31  | 100 | 57  | 24  | 33  | 43  | 53  | 33  | 50  | 27  | 43  | 24  | 32  | 51  | 37  |
| 6 Educ6                          | 49  | 61  | 62  | 70  | 57  | 100 | 40  | 58  | 54  | 65  | 41  | 62  | 37  | 51  | 48  | 41  | 49  | 59  |
| 7 Educ7                          | 40  | 29  | 41  | 41  | 24  | 40  | 100 | 48  | 35  | 36  | 45  | 43  | 47  | 37  | 42  | 8   | 49  | 38  |
| 8 Educ8                          | 49  | 57  | 53  | 52  | 33  | 58  | 48  | 100 | 44  | 64  | 49  | 52  | 51  | 68  | 61  | 43  | 44  | 45  |
| 9 Educ9                          | 51  | 41  | 63  | 56  | 43  | 54  | 35  | 44  | 100 | 50  | 59  | 71  | 53  | 51  | 39  | 28  | 34  | 36  |
| 10 Educ10                        | 54  | 64  | 42  | 62  | 53  | 65  | 36  | 64  | 50  | 100 | 66  | 52  | 44  | 55  | 47  | 39  | 58  | 54  |
| 11 Educ11                        | 52  | 57  | 56  | 56  | 33  | 41  | 45  | 49  | 59  | 66  | 100 | 64  | 59  | 61  | 46  | 39  | 54  | 39  |
| 12 Educ12                        | 62  | 61  | 71  | 64  | 50  | 62  | 43  | 52  | 71  | 52  | 64  | 100 | 62  | 61  | 55  | 45  | 64  | 36  |
| 13 Educ13                        | 78  | 44  | 47  | 54  | 27  | 37  | 47  | 51  | 53  | 44  | 59  | 62  | 100 | 77  | 70  | 63  | 68  | 34  |
| 14 Educ14                        | 72  | 57  | 56  | 57  | 43  | 51  | 37  | 68  | 51  | 55  | 61  | 61  | 77  | 100 | 61  | 56  | 57  | 46  |
| 15 Educ15                        | 68  | 31  | 32  | 53  | 24  | 48  | 42  | 61  | 39  | 47  | 46  | 55  | 70  | 61  | 100 | 64  | 64  | 43  |
| 16 Educ16                        | 67  | 35  | 33  | 50  | 32  | 41  | 8   | 43  | 28  | 39  | 39  | 45  | 63  | 56  | 64  | 100 | 44  | 37  |
| 17 Educ17                        | 68  | 52  | 44  | 53  | 51  | 49  | 49  | 44  | 34  | 58  | 54  | 64  | 68  | 57  | 64  | 44  | 100 | 43  |
| 18 Educ18                        | 56  | 40  | 51  | 44  | 37  | 59  | 38  | 45  | 36  | 54  | 39  | 36  | 34  | 46  | 43  | 37  | 43  | 100 |

**Table 5: Correlation matrix between sorts**

Using the correlation matrix, PQMethod groups the sorts into unrotated factors. The Q sort data is classified into clusters based on factor loadings. Brown (1980 p. 208) explains this:

If two persons are like-minded on a topic, their Q sorts will be similar and they will both end up on the same factor. Hence, we do not classify them: they classify themselves on their own terms, which emerge as factors. (Brown 1980, p. 208)

Therefore, those sorts that correspond highly are clustered into a factor. Once the correlation matrix is generated, the factor extraction and analysis process begins. Watts and Stenner (2012) describe a method to examine the unrotated factors. The first suggestion given by Watts and Stenner (2012) is to undertake a Principal component analysis. The Principal component analysis generates the eigenvalues of each factor. The eigenvalues reflect the amount of variation accounted for by the corresponding factor (Brown M 2004, p. 20). The eigenvalue can be used as one criterion to decide how many factors to extract in the overall factor analysis. Eigenvalues above 1.00 would indicate that a factor is likely to make a significant contribution to the final factor solution and should be retained.

The Principal component analysis showed that factor one had an eigenvalue of **9.1526** accounting for 51% of the variance, and factor 2 had an eigenvalue of **1.0609** accounting for 6% of the variance. Factor 3 had an eigenvalue of **0.1348** and a variance of **1%** which was not applicable for this research. Applying this criterion to the unrotated factor matrix shown in Table 8, it can be seen that Factors 1 and 2 clearly met this criterion. A scree test was also used to display the eigenvalues (see Figure 7). Figure 7 shows that Factor 3 has an eigenvalue less than 1.0 as indicated by the slope change in the line gradient following Factor 2. The factors with an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more were deemed statistically significant, representing ‘the shared item pattern or configuration that is characteristic of that factor’ (Watts & Stenner 2005, p. 81).

|             | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Eigenvalues | 9.1526   | 1.0609   | 0.1348   |
| % Variance  | 51       | 6        | 1        |

**Table 6: Table showing Eigenvalues and variance of each factor**

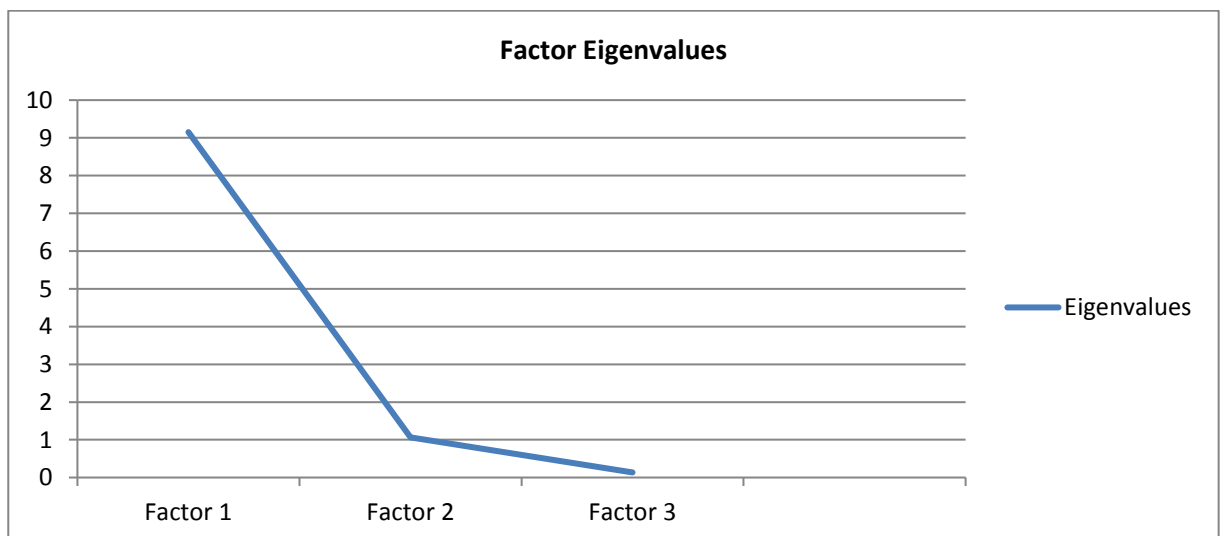


**Figure 7: Scree plot generated from an initial Principal components analysis, prior to factor extraction**

However useful the Principal component analysis and scree test is in relation to determining eigenvalues, it does not reveal how many of the participants’ viewpoints were represented in the factors. This leads us into the next step of data analysis using PQMethod.

### 4.2.3 Centroid analysis

The next step involves the factor extraction itself. Centroid analysis<sup>11</sup> was used as it is the preferred method by Q researchers as it allows the researcher to explore fully the solutions by rotating factors using what he or she knows about the participants and the topic. Centroid analysis identifies patterns of similarity between the Q sorts and extracts centroids or factors which are Q sort configurations with common or shared meaning (Watts & Stenner 2012). This is useful because the purpose of Q methodology is not to identify singular viewpoints but to highlight the significant viewpoints shared in the particular group of people (Ire 2014).

As a standard, the PQMethod software provides seven unrotated factors. Watts and Stenner (2012, p. 197) suggest extracting a factor for every six Q sorts in the study. This study consisted of 18 Q sorts; therefore, it was ideal to extract three factors. Table 7 below displays the un-rotated factor matrix which includes the factor loadings.

| Sorts       | Participant | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
|-------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1           | Educ1       | 0.8254   | 0.3180   | 0.0764   |
| 2           | Educ2       | 0.6990   | -0.1646  | 0.0375   |
| 3           | Educ3       | 0.7061   | -0.2816  | 0.1017   |
| 4           | Educ4       | 0.7582   | -0.0773  | 0.0110   |
| 5           | Educ5       | 0.5478   | -0.1148  | 0.0203   |
| 6           | Educ6       | 0.7538   | -0.3682  | 0.1789   |
| 7           | Educ7       | 0.5270   | -0.0650  | 0.0083   |
| 8           | Educ8       | 0.7243   | -0.0418  | 0.0045   |
| 9           | Educ9       | 0.6704   | -0.2441  | 0.0769   |
| 10          | Educ10      | 0.7549   | -0.2248  | 0.0660   |
| 11          | Educ11      | 0.7299   | -0.0697  | 0.0094   |
| 12          | Educ12      | 0.8181   | -0.0794  | 0.0116   |
| 13          | Educ13      | 0.7649   | 0.4638   | 0.2019   |
| 14          | Educ14      | 0.8080   | 0.1640   | 0.0137   |
| 15          | Educ15      | 0.7045   | 0.3830   | 0.1216   |
| 16          | Educ16      | 0.5958   | 0.3990   | 0.1349   |
| 17          | Educ17      | 0.7460   | 0.1405   | 0.0085   |
| 18          | Educ18      | 0.6099   | -0.0614  | 0.0077   |
| Eigenvalues |             | 9.1526   | 1.0609   | 0.1348   |

**Table 7: Unrotated factor matrix**

Stainton-Rogers (1995, p. 191) reiterates that the factors which emerge from a Q methodological study such as the above are the result not of ‘built-in definitions but of the sorting activity of participants themselves’. The researcher then should determine a significant factor loading. Watts and Stenner (2012) affirm that a Q sort should be

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<sup>11</sup> Centroid analysis is a data reduction technique used almost exclusively in Q methodology to identify factors as described in Brown (1980).

considered significant in terms of loading upon a factor based on the statistical calculation  $p < 0.01 = 2.58 (1/\sqrt{\text{number of statements}})$  (Brown 1980, pp. 222–223; Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 130). In this study, the level of significance was calculated as **0.44** ( $2.58 \times (1/\sqrt{34}) = 0.44$ ). Thus, any Q sort with a factor loading more than 0.44 is said to define the viewpoint of a factor. Any Q sort with a single loading more than 0.44 is said to be ‘closely approximate, exemplify or define the viewpoint of a particular focus’ (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 130) as factor loadings are the degree to which an individual’s sort correlates with a factor (Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009, p. 29).

Table 7 shows that Factor 1 clearly has a range of significant factor loadings. Factor 3 in the above table shows no significant factor loadings. Factor 2 only has 1 sort that significantly loaded above 0.44. Therefore, I followed the guidelines provided by Watts and Stenner (2012, p. 107) and applied ‘Humphreys Rule’. The ‘Humphreys Rule’ method states that a factor is significant ‘if the cross-product of its two highest loadings (ignoring the sign) exceeds twice the standard error’ (Brown 1980, p. 223 cited in Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 107). The Standard Error was calculated as follows:

$$= 1 / (\sqrt{\text{no. of items in Q set}})$$

$$= 1 / (\sqrt{34})$$

$$= 1 / 5.8309$$

$$= 0.1715$$

**Twice the standard error for this study is 0.34.** Therefore, the multiplied factor loadings should exceed 0.34. The two highest loadings on Factor 2 are 0.40 and 0.38. Applying Humphreys Rule suggests that Factor 2 should be extracted and retained and Factor 3 discarded. This is in-line with Stainton-Rogers’s (1995) advice that to produce interpretable factors, it is essential:

to derive a best estimate of that factor in terms of a weighted average of the Q sorts in terms of their loadings on that factor. To achieve this, one requires that the loadings of each Q sort should be large on one factor and trivial on the other. (Stainton-Rogers 1995, p. 15)

This is accomplished in the next step by a process called rotation which can either be conducted according to mathematical criteria, Varimax rotation or by a manual hand rotation.

#### 4.2.4 Varimax rotation

The second step comprises factor rotation which ‘involves the physical movement or rotation of the factors, and their viewpoints about a central axis point’ (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 122). The term ‘factor extraction’ refers to the way in which factors emerge from the correlation matrix. The choice of how many factors to extract and interpret is dependent upon certain statistical guidelines provided by the literature:

- Factors should only be retained with an eigenvalue greater than 1.00 (Brown 1980).
- Factors should have at least two Q sorts which load significantly upon it (Watts & Stenner 2012).

Following this criterion, Factors 1 and 2 were retained and subjected to Varimax rotation. PQMethod offers two rotation methods – manual and Varimax. Varimax rotation was considered the best method as it is considered a ‘purely technical objective procedure’ (Van Exel & De Graaf 2005, p. 11). Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009, p. 10) suggest using Varimax rotation procedure to avoid researcher judgement and to be more transparent. I chose Varimax rotation as I believed that hand rotation and ultimately deciding where each factor should be positioned was subjective, unreliable and not holistic. The purpose of the Q methodology was to ascertain from the sample the perspectives and viewpoints of participants in relation to the research question. Therefore, I surmised that hand rotation could potentially reflect my own understandings of the viewpoints instead of the viewpoints of participants.

PQ Method also has an option for automatically pre-flagging factors. Flagging is important because the final description of each factor will be based on a weighted average of only those sorts flagged as loading onto that factor (Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009, p. 30). The program will automatically flag those sorts, by placing an x next to each loading that PQMethod determines as significant. Table 8 below displays each sort with significant loadings greater than 0.44.

| Sorts | Participant | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|-------|-------------|----------|----------|
| 1     | Educ1       | 0.4367   | 0.7691x  |
| 2     | Educ2       | 0.6445x  | 0.3146   |
| 3     | Educ3       | 0.7281x  | 0.2402   |
| 4     | Educ4       | 0.6330x  | 0.4139   |
| 5     | Educ5       | 0.4956x  | 0.2560   |
| 6     | Educ6       | 0.8242x  | 0.2163   |
| 7     | Educ7       | 0.4471x  | 0.2791   |
| 8     | Educ8       | 0.5839x  | 0.4189   |

|                  |        |         |         |
|------------------|--------|---------|---------|
| 9                | Educ9  | 0.6753x | 0.2426  |
| 10               | Educ10 | 0.7274x | 0.3080  |
| 11               | Educ11 | 0.6063x | 0.4018  |
| 12               | Educ12 | 0.6804x | 0.4496  |
| 13               | Educ13 | 0.3044  | 0.8640x |
| 14               | Educ14 | 0.5178  | 0.6300x |
| 15               | Educ15 | 0.3048  | 0.7513x |
| 16               | Educ16 | 0.2119  | 0.6981x |
| 17               | Educ17 | 0.4848  | 0.5726x |
| 18               | Educ18 | 0.5086x | 0.3333  |
| % Expl. Variance |        | 32      | 25      |

**Table 8: Factor loadings of all Q sorts after Varimax rotation**

Two factors emerged accounting for **57% of the total variance** and with eigenvalues greater than 1. In Table 8 the factor loadings with an x indicate a defining sort, which means that these sorts largely characterize the view that has emerged as a factor. It is apparent in the above table that the first factor was constructed by 12 respondent sorts, and the second by six. The first factor explains 32% variation of participant sorts, and the second factor 25%. This indicates that there were two dissimilar perspectives of cultural competence.

After experimenting with various alternatives by Varimax rotation of factors, the researcher decided to include a two-factor based on several reasons based on Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009, p. 31) criteria. Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009, p 31) infer that there is ‘no one objectively correct number of factors to use as any number of factors will give the researcher some insight into how people think about the issues’. As in any qualitative analysis, this decision rests on the judgement of the researcher. However, Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009) highlight several criteria which could be used to help decide on a final number of factors: simplicity, clarity, distinctness and stability.

**Simplicity:** Fewer factors are better, as simplicity makes the viewpoints easier to understand.

**Clarity:** The best factor solution is one in which each sorter loads highly on one and only one factor. It is better to minimise the number of ‘confounders’, people who load on multiple factors and non-loaders, those who do not load on any factor.

**Distinctness:** Lower correlations between factors are better as highly correlated factors are saying similar things.

Stability: It is possible while analysing a number of factors to identify those people who clustered together, which indicates that these individuals think similarly. (Webler, Danielson & Tuler 2009, p. 31).

The next step involves interpreting the factor arrays.

#### **4.2.5 The two-factor solution**

Interpretations are based on factor arrays and factor scores (Brown M 2004, p. 22). The final step in the statistical procedure before interpreting the factors is to produce a factor array table. A factor array table contains the statements scores for each factor based on the weighted average of its defining Q sorts. These factor arrays reflect an overall Q sample for the participants who loaded significantly on the factor. By perusing these factor arrays we can identify those distinguishing statements that are associated with each factor. This highlights the pattern of shared thought and meaning specific to each factor group. The two factors together had 18 defining Q sorts. This is reflected in the factor array table (Appendix 3) which contains all the statements and the scores for each factor based on the weighted average of its defining Q sorts.

The factor array table enables a comparison of the item rankings across Factor 1 and Factor 2. The rankings are indicative of the viewpoints of participants from least important (-4) through to the most important (+4). By way of an example, the most important statements for factor 1 were statements 21, 'It is important for educators to recognise and promote culture in developing children's sense of being, becoming and belonging' and statement 33, 'Developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development'. In comparison, the most important statements for factor 2 were statements 14, 'My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs' and statement 20, 'I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site'. This highlights the varied viewpoints held by participants. Detailed analysis of the factor arrays along with other significant data will be discussed in detail in section 4.3.

Although a researcher intends to remain objective as possible, within Q methodology studies Watts and Stenner (2012, p. 148) suggest undertaking a systemic analysis of each factor array utilising what they refer to as a 'crib sheet'<sup>12</sup> (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 148). This is to eliminate or minimise researcher bias. Watts and Stenner (2012) advocate for the use of a crib sheet as a tool to assist in examining the factor array in detail through a

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<sup>12</sup> Crib sheet – prepared for each individual factor and used to aid interpretation of each factor. See Appendix 4.

rigorous and systematic procedure. The crib sheet is described by Watts and Stenner (2012) as a procedure for a:

systematic and methodological approach to factor interpretation that might: (1) be applied consistently in the context of each and every factor; and (2) allow the researcher to deliver genuinely holistic interpretations. (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 150)

Examining each factor array through such a systematic and consistent process ensures that each factor array is checked in detail and is subjected to the same ‘thorough and rigorous’ process (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 150). This method allows items of importance within a factor array to be identified. Ire (2014, p. 24) suggests that interpretation of factor arrays using the crib sheet procedure brings ‘a much fuller picture and breathes life into the factors’ and further suggests that interpretation is a ‘story-building process’. The use of a crib sheet for each factor array allows the researcher to explore the data in depth by considering the weight or importance of each statement and its position comparative to other factor arrays.

#### ***4.2.6 Method of interpretation***

In relation to the method of interpreting the factors, it is useful to keep in mind that interpretation in Q methodology is applied through examining the statements that describe the factors (Brown 1980). Addams and Proops (2000, p. 33) remind us that there is not a ‘set formula for presenting the interpretation and explanation of factors’. What is important is interpreting the Q factors as a patterned whole (Brown 2008). This aligns with the previous chapter’s suggestion that the aim of factor interpretation is to ‘uncover, understand and fully explain the viewpoint captured by the factor and shared by the significantly loaded participants’ (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 181).

To ensure a systematic and logical approach to factor interpretation I referred to the ‘crib sheet’<sup>13</sup> in the interpretation of the factors. I also utilised the factor arrays table<sup>14</sup> to guide interpretation. Stenner, Cooper and Skevington (2003, p. 2165) affirm that the factor interpretation ‘takes the form of a careful and holistic inspection of the patterning of items in the factor arrays’. The essence of Stenner, Cooper and Skevington’s (2003) argument is that the researcher needs to consider all angles and use all the available data to interpret the factors. Watts and Stenner (2012, p. 181) claim that the purpose of factor interpretation is to ‘uncover, understand and fully explain the viewpoint captured by the factor and shared by the significantly loading participants’. The crib sheet method has the advantage of

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 4

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 3

identifying those statements ranked toward the middle or zero point of distribution that might otherwise be ignored (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 154). It shouldn't be assumed that a zero or near zero ranking is symbolic of impartiality or 'a general lack of significance or meaning' (Watts & Stenner 2012, p. 155). The ranking of items in those positions provide a full and holistic picture and are important in the interpretation process. For example, if we refer to the factor arrays table (Appendix 3) and examine Factor 1, statement 30, 'Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in our program is too political', participants who loaded significantly on this factor rated this statement at (-3) leaning towards 'strongly disagree'. On the other hand, the same participants loaded significantly on statement 34, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are regularly included in our daily program' at (0). This shows the extreme rankings of statements related to the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives.

Another example for Factor 2, statement 6, 'I take responsibility for learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' culture and community' loaded at (0), and statement 20, 'I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site' at (+4). This too highlights the extreme ranking of comparable statements. The factor arrays table (Appendix 3) and the crib sheet (Appendix 4) used in this research proved indispensable as it assisted the researcher to apply a holistic lens while making relative judgments about the value ascribed to each statement, while considering all angles and using all available data from the software analysis.

### ***4.3 Reporting the two-factor solution***

I presented in the previous sections an in-depth argument for my choice of a two-factor solution; therefore, here I will be reporting on and describing the two factors. The reporting of factors is kept to a brief description with the focus on identification of their distinguishing features with the use of the factor arrays table (Appendix 3). Each factor is named with a descriptive phrase or sentence that focuses on the most prominent feature of the factor. The names given to the 2 factors are intended to act as an abbreviated narrative title as it encapsulates some essence of the larger narrative. Both factors provide insight into participants' viewpoints about cultural competence. The factor analysis showed that most participants loaded on one of two factors that were labelled as:

Factor 1: Beginning the journey towards cultural competence.

Factor 2: Learning with Aboriginal families and communities.

For ease of interpretation, the narrative descriptions below the statements discussed are followed by numbers in brackets. The first of these represents the number of the statement being highlighted, and the second number signifies the position within the factor array. For example, in Factor 1, for statement 2 participants loaded significantly on -3 (see Table 8). This is displayed as **(2: -3)**. Similarly, for Factor 2, for statement 5 participants loaded significantly on +1. This is displayed as **(5: +1)**. Statements are also highlighted within the narrative using italics. By way of an example, in Factor 1, statement 2 is presented as '*Cultural competence is an event*' **(2: -3)**.

In addition to the factor analysis data, each participant was invited to make comment. Of the 18 participants, six participants, three from each factor, provided comments and were used in the process of factor interpretation and to support the factors narrative. The next section will highlight the findings of the Q methodology data analysis. Both factors are presented as narratives that provides insight into educators' understandings and perspectives about cultural competence.

#### **4.3.1 Factor 1 - Beginning the journey towards Cultural Competence**

Factor 1 has the largest number of participants loading onto it. 12 individuals loaded onto this factor and it explains 32% of the study variance. Eight participants have been teaching for 10+ years; one participant between 6 to 9 years and two between 3 to 5 years. Table 9 highlights the high positive and high negative statements that participants loaded significantly on this factor.

| <b>FACTOR 1</b>                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>-4</b>                                                                                                                                           | <b>-3</b>                                                                                                                  | <b>+3</b>                                                                                                | <b>+4</b>                                                                                                                           |
| 12. I wait until I am given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our program so I don't do the wrong thing. | 2. Cultural competence is an event.                                                                                        | 4. I value different culture's ways of knowing and being.                                                | 21. It is important for educators to recognise and promote culture in developing children's sense of being, becoming and belonging. |
| 29. Cultural competence is an off-the-shelf program adding yet another educational buzzword.                                                        | 8. While I do not believe in the practices and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, I tolerate them. | 5. I understand the importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. | 33. Developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development.                                                  |

**Table 9: Factor 1 high positive and high negative statements**

Factor 1 is defined by the view that *‘developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development’* (33: +4). Participants deny that *‘cultural competence is an event’* (2: -3) nor an *‘off-the-shelf program adding yet another educational buzz word’* (29: -4). Participant 18 stated:

I disagree with the statement that cultural competence is a buzz word because it should be happening each day in your own service not just when we have to add cultural competence in the service.

Similarly, participant 8 commented:

Cultural Competence is a way of life.

Participants in Factor 1 *‘value different culture’s ways of knowing and being’* (4: +3) and *‘understand ‘culture’ and its important role in education’* (32: +1). There is also awareness amongst participants of *‘acknowledging cultural differences as the first step to becoming culturally competent’* (9: +1). Participants also acknowledge the *‘importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures’* (5: +3). Participant 18 commented:

I strongly believe this is their history and where they have come from and this belongs to each culture and where the cultures come from, so much stories and history. They are connected to the land through their culture.

Participants were unsure the role and place of their own cultural understandings and beliefs, this is evident in the ‘neutral’ placing of the statement, *‘my personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs’* (14: 0). But participants are aware of their *‘own worldview and how it impacts on practice’* (7: +1).

Participants in factor 1 are strong in their understanding of the importance of the educators’ role to *‘recognise and promote culture in developing children’s sense of being, becoming and belonging’* (21: +4). Participant 8 stated:

Children’s culture needs to be acknowledged and included as part of the whole child development.

Contradictory to this, participants ranked low when it came to seeking *‘support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site’* (20: -1), nor do participants *‘support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and use the cultural tools of the community’* (16: -1). Interestingly, participants consider they *‘take responsibility for learning about Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander students’ culture and community’* (6:

+1). Inconsistent with their perspectives on engaging with their local Aboriginal community to support children's learning, participants suggest that they '*endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my [their] service*' (1: +2). Participant 7 specified:

We have a number of Aboriginal families attending - it is part of my way to ensure their voice is heard: and to ensure sensitivity to planned learning experiences occurs and is culturally appropriate.

Similarly, participant 8 commented:

Every parent needs to feel valued.

Participants affirmed that using '*traditional images, posters and celebrations*' was not conducive to supporting Aboriginal land Torres Strait Islander identity in the service (3: -1). Subsequently, participants view '*continuous improvement and reflection*' (25: +2) as vital in their service and particularly in relation to Aboriginal children and families. Participants claim to '*advocate for the review of my [their] site's philosophy statement and Quality Improvement Plan to ensure that they incorporate principles and practices that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence*' (28: +3). Participant 7 affirmed:

I believe it is necessary to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in our site philosophy as well as all cultures being represented.

A comment by participant 18 reinforced this point:

I believe this is part of the QIP - to promote inclusion and diversity in the service is a big factor to improve the service and the practices in the service. Educators having more understanding about cultural competence will benefit the service and the connections between cultures and each child having a sense of belonging.

Overall, participants in Factor 1 advocate the importance of including 'culture' in their sites philosophy statement and is consistent with the belief that educators should have an understanding of cultural competence. Feelings were neutral in relation to professional learning that has '*enhanced my [their] understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence*' (26: 0). For this reason, participants were also impartial in their understanding of '*the explicit practice in the Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, "The Journey for Educators: Growing competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures"*' (23: 0), but claim to be '*aware of the differences between cultural awareness and cultural competence*' (24: +2). Furthermore, participants can recognise that they have not '*reached a high level of cultural competence*' (31: -2). This is evident in the ordering of the following statement, '*I don't see colour or*

*culture in my service; my programs and practices are inclusive of all children regardless of culture’ (27: +1).*

Factor 1 is characterised as ‘beginning a journey towards being culturally competent’. Within this factor, participants placed significant value in understanding and recognising culture in developing children’s sense of belonging but did not seek support from or use the cultural tools of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Participants are also aware of how their worldviews and values impact on their practice, this may explain why engagement with Aboriginal communities is not undertaken. Nevertheless, value is placed on attempting to understand and value Aboriginal ways of knowing and being including understanding that the use of traditional images and practices may offend families. Participants also agree that cultural competence is a long term ongoing process of development. Therefore, for most participants in this factor building relationships with their local Aboriginal communities to strengthen service delivery may occur throughout the journey. The next section shares a narrative relative to the findings of Factor 2.

#### **4.3.2 Factor 2 - Learning with Aboriginal Communities and Families**

Factor 2 has the smallest number of participants loading onto it. Six individuals loaded onto this factor and it explains 25% of the study variance. Out of these individuals two claim to have been teaching for 10+ years; one between 6 to 9 years and one between 3 to 5 years. Two participants didn’t provide any demographic details. Table 10 highlights the high positive and high negative statements for those participants that loaded significantly on factor 2.

| <b>FACTOR 2</b>                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>-4</b>                                                                                                                                           | <b>-3</b>                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>+3</b>                                                                                                                                    | <b>+4</b>                                                                                                                                                            |
| 8. While I do not believe in the practices and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, I tolerate them.                          | 2. Cultural competence is an event.                                                                                                                                                | 1. I endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my service. | 14. My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs.                                                              |
| 12. I wait until I am given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our program so I don’t do the wrong thing. | 18. It is not necessary to specifically include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence in our sites philosophy statement as all cultures should be represented. | 9. Awareness of cultural differences is the first step to becoming a culturally competent educator.                                          | 20. I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site. |

**Table 10: Factor 2 high positive and high negative statements**

Participants in factor 2 believe that *'their personal and professional interactions are guided by my [their] own cultural understandings and beliefs'* (14: +4) and are aware of *'how my [their] own worldview ... impacts on my [their] practices'* (7: +2). Referring to statement 7 about being aware of personal worldviews, participant 14 acknowledged that:

It is often the line taken by those beginning on their journey towards cultural competency. Knowing and acknowledging one's own world view is the basis for all reflective practice.

Conversely, participants *'endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my [the] service'* (1: +3). They also agree that *'awareness of cultural differences is the first step to becoming a culturally competent educator'* (9: +3). Equally, participants *'value different culture's ways of knowing and being'* (4: +2) and affirm that *'it is important for educators to recognise and promote culture in developing children's sense of being, becoming and belonging'* (21: +2). This includes *'acknowledge[ing] and value[ing] Aboriginal English as a means to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging'* (15: +2) and also *'understand[ing] the importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures'* (5: +1).

Participants who loaded significantly on this factor do not *'wait until [they are] given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our [the] program'* (12: -4) and *'regularly include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the daily program'* (34: +1). Participant 14 stood strong in her assertion:

I am not felled by fear: as an educator, it is my responsibility to begin the journey with children and families and not wait until I believe that I have all of the information needed.

Consequently, participants *'support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders children's learning by using the cultural tools of the community'* (16: +3). This is reinforced by participant 14 who insisted:

...where else would you start with when working with families and children?

Participants within this factor *'seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures service by their sites'* (20: +4). Participant 15 stated:

I try hard to learn from my Aboriginal parents and families their values and beliefs.

Participants '*endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal and families that access their services*' (1: +3). Participant 17 affirmed:

I attempt to learn about all of the cultures represented in our service.

Interestingly, participants were neutral in their stance of promoting '*a system of continuous improvement and reflection in my [their] practice*' (25: 0). Hence, participants were impartial in '*advocate[ing] for the review of my [their] site's philosophy statement and Quality Improvement Plan to ensure that they incorporate principles and practices that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence*' (28:0). Consequently, participants disagreed with the statement that '*it is not necessary to specifically include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence in our (their) sites philosophy statement as all cultures should be represented*' (18: -3). As noted previously, this is consistent with their understanding that '*acknowledge[ing] and value[ing] Aboriginal English as a means to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging*' (15: +2) and is congruent with participants valuing of '*different culture's ways of knowing and being*' (4: +2).

Participants confirm that they have not attended '*one professional learning session within the last 12 months that has enhanced their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence*' (26: -1). Participant 14 reflected:

Most training that I have undertaken has been adhoc and somewhat haphazard. I would appreciate a systematic approach so that my understanding could grow.

Participant 15 elaborated:

If only there was more support from leaders and the system around how we begin this journey towards growing cultural competence.

Participants in this factor claim to have '*a clear understanding of the explicit practice in the Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, "The Journey for Educators: Growing competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures"*' (23: +1); which corresponds with their beliefs that '*awareness of cultural differences is the first step to becoming a culturally competence educator*' (9: +3). Furthermore, participants affirm that '*developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development*' (33: +1). Participant 17 asserted:

One can't claim to be culturally competent; it's not a skills checklist to tick off.

Participants disagreed with the statement *'I have attended a 'Cultural awareness' training and am competent enough'* (11: -2). Equally, opposed the statement *'I have undertaken cultural competence training and am happy with my current knowledge of Aboriginal cultures'* (22: -1). Similarly, participants disagreed with the statement that they *'have reached a high level of cultural competence'* (31: -1).

Factor 2 is characterised as learning with Aboriginal families and communities. Participants within this factor placed value in understanding the influence of their worldviews on their professional practice. They also additionally acknowledged as an important part of the journey towards growing cultural competence. Participants in Factor 2 also value input from their local Aboriginal communities and families to assist in service delivery.

This chapter concludes with a description of the principal findings relative to the two research questions. The first question asked, 'What are educators' understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence as outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework?'. The findings in this section shows that participants in Factor 1 value culture in children's education but fail to utilise the tools of the community. This is evidence in their positioning of the statement about the value of working with Aboriginal communities. Contradictory to this, participants place value on promoting a system of continuous improvement and additionally advocate to ensure that they incorporate in their sites philosophy statements principles and practices that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence. Participants in factor 1 understand the role culture plays in children's education but perceive systemic structures to be adequate to ensure that cultural competence is inclusive at an organisation level.

Contrary to this, Factor 2 represents educators understanding of cultural competence as a long-term journey that happens in relationships with Aboriginal families and communities. Participants seek the support of their local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served within their site. Participants also acknowledge the importance of drawing on the cultural tools of their communities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging. Understandings of cultural competence for participants in Factor 2 centred on relationships to ensure that cultural competence is relevant and responsive to the children and families they work with.

Research question two centres on how educators describe their proficiency of cultural competence. Both factors are congruent in their understandings and perspectives that cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development. For this reason, consensus that one cannot reach a fixed level of competency is evident between both factors. Additionally, professional learning around cultural competence was identified as ad hoc and inapt at enhancing their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the application of Q methodology with a detailed explanation of the processes used to conduct a Q methodological study. PQMethod software (Schmlock 2014) enabled the researcher to explore the Q sorts in detail and apply centroid analysis and varimax rotation to reach a two-factor solution. Utilising PQMethod data outputs to develop the factors array table and crib sheet enabled the holistic interpretation of the factors as a patterned whole (Brown 2008). Each factor was named with a descriptive phrase or sentence that focussed on the most prominent feature of the factor. Both factors provide insight into participants' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. The factor analysis showed that participants loaded on one of two factors that were labelled as:

Factor 1: Beginning the journey towards cultural competence.

Factor 2: Learning with Aboriginal families and communities.

Factor 1 is characterised as beginning a journey towards being culturally competent. Within this factor, participants placed significant value in understanding and recognising culture in developing children's sense of belonging but did not seek support from or use the cultural tools of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Cultural competence as a long-term journey that happens in relationships with Aboriginal families and communities is characteristic of factor two. Participants in Factor 2 valued input from their local Aboriginal communities and families to assist in service delivery. The two factors defined in this study cannot allege to be representative of the totality of the possible discourses and viewpoints about cultural competence but they can at least claim to be present and to a certain degree an influential discourse at the current time. The Q methodology findings will also be incorporated, where necessary, in later data analysis chapters. In the next section I will present the principal findings of the semi-structured interviews.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Themes from yarning about cultural competence**

### ***5.1 Introduction***

This research used mixed methods to gain insight into educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. The previous chapter presented the processes used to conduct a Q methodological study. The analysis process concluded with the presentation of two factors. The two factors were each presented as narratives labelled as:

Factor 1: Beginning the journey towards cultural competence

Factor 2: Learning with Aboriginal families and communities.

This chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews which used an Indigenous methodology of yarning.

#### ***5.1.1 Semi-structured interviews***

Semi-structured interviews using an Indigenous methodology of yarning was chosen to gain a detailed understanding of educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Yarning through semi-structured interviews was deemed to be an appropriate method to respond to the two research questions:

1. What are educators' understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence as outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework?
2. How do educators describe their proficiency with cultural competence?

To gain a comprehensive account of educators' understandings and perspectives towards cultural competence, the researcher developed five questions to guide the semi-structured interview.

1. What is your understanding of cultural competence?
2. What perceptions do you have about the practice of cultural competence with particular attention to 'growing educators' competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures' as outlined in the EYLF?
3. In your view, is cultural competence important in the educational setting?
4. How would you describe your level of cultural competence?

5. What structures have supported or constrained your work, and the work of your staff when applying culturally competent practices?

The questions were used as probing questions for all participants as I wanted to ensure adequate breadth and depth of the topic to be covered. Questions were not necessarily asked in order as I followed the participant's lead in the yarn. At times participants told stories and meandered to another issue but it was important as part of the yarning process to follow, so to say, the participants' storylines. This approach to yarning offered the potential to provide a holistic context that allowed individuals to reflect and reconstruct their personal experiences, understandings and perspectives towards the topic. It also ensured that any Aboriginal participants had opportunity to express their perspectives in their own ways and in a culturally safe manner. In this way, Indigenous knowledge systems, ways of doing, perspectives and participation were reflected in the research process (Dean 2010, p. 6).

I made contact by email to all participants outlining and explaining the purpose of the research and to begin developing our 'research' relationship. Consequently, emails were exchanged back and forth between researcher and each participant to confirm participation and organise a suitable and mutually agreeable time and place to meet. The yarns occurred over several weeks at various locations. Each participant chose the setting. At the time of meeting, the participants were provided with a copy of the participant information sheet and consent form. Time was also allowed for each participant to read through the information sheet and consent form and ask questions. The researcher also gave a verbal explanation of the research and details on how data was to be stored. Written consent was received from all nine participants.

All interviews were digitally recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed and reviewed by the researcher for accuracy and content. This provided opportunity for the researcher to examine the raw data in detail and to be immersed in the data to gain a deeper insight into each participant's understandings and to allow themes to emerge. The participants were considered in all aspects of the research design and the researcher ensured that their needs and privacy were observed. Once yarns were transcribed, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities and other identifying information such as preschool sites were omitted to secure confidentiality. Additionally, the transcript of each yarn was sent back to each participant for checking and approval and to ensure it was representative of their voice, understandings, perspectives

and reflections. All the participants provided approval via email to use transcripts in the research.

### ***5.1.2 Participant demographics***

In this phase of the study purposeful sampling was used to deliberately select participants to provide information relevant to the research questions. The participants who were purposefully selected for this study were all early childhood teachers, all currently employed in positions that were required to have an early childhood degree. The nine participants identified as current preschool directors (four), preschool teachers (two) and those who worked previously as early childhood teachers and/or Directors that were now in early years policy and curriculum development at a state level (three). Of these nine participants, three identified as Aboriginal and all participants were female and had been employed in early years education for over 10+ years. Table 11 highlights the participant demographics.

|       | Gender | Age group | Cultural background | Level of education | Attended cultural competence professional learning |
|-------|--------|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Jenny | F      | 50+       | Aboriginal          | Diploma            | Y                                                  |
| Joan  | F      | 41-50     | Anglo Australian    | Degree             | Y                                                  |
| June  | F      | 41-50     | Aboriginal          | Degree             | Y                                                  |
| Mary  | F      | 41-50     | Anglo Australian    | Degree             | Y                                                  |
| Ruth  | F      | 41-50     | Anglo Australian    | Degree             | Y                                                  |
| Sally | F      | 41-50     | Aboriginal          | Degree             | Y                                                  |
| Paula | F      | 50+       | Anglo Australian    | Degree             | Y                                                  |
| Laura | F      | 41-50     | Anglo Australian    | Masters            | Y                                                  |
| Kate  | F      | 41-50     | Anglo Australian    | Degree             | Y                                                  |

**Table 11: Semi-structured interview participant demographics**

Initially, the research was concerned that nine was a relatively small number of participants. Regardless of the numbers of participants, the data gathered was rich and brought to the study unique understandings and perspectives related to the research questions. Sandelowski (1995) also contends that an adequate sample size in qualitative

research is one that results in a ‘new and richly textured understanding of experience’ (Sandelowski 1995, p. 153).

### ***5.1.3 Yarning in action***

The researcher drew on the works of Bessarab and Ng’andu (2010) who describe four types of yarns that can be used primarily in research with and for Aboriginal people. The four types of yarns identified by Bessarab and Ng’andu (2010) include; social yarning, collaborative yarning, research yarning and therapeutic yarning. These types of yarns can take place in a semi-structured interview (Bessarab & Ng’andu 2010, 40). Semi-structured interviews allowed for both prepared questions to be asked and any questions arising from participants’ responses.

As noted previously, providing a single definition for yarning is precarious because it potentially limits its application within different Aboriginal contexts. For the researcher, a yarn is dependent upon certain conditions. For example, yarning can never happen in isolation and without context, and must include principles of respect, reciprocity, trust and understanding all of which underpin Indigenous epistemologies and ways of doing.

For transparency, I have included below excerpts from selected yarns to demonstrate yarning in action which was dependant on context and participant. The first excerpt outlines a snapshot of a yarn with an Aboriginal early childhood educator “Jenny”, who has worked in the field of early childhood education for over 25 years. It is also important to identify that although the researcher has never worked alongside this Aboriginal early childhood educator, we do have a relational extended connection based on our kinship ties. This research participant invited me to her site. Upon arriving, we moved through different types of yarns as identified by Bessarab and Ng’andu (2010) beginning with a social yarn, moving into a collaborative yarn, beginning a research yarn, back to a social yarn and returning to the research yarn and so on. During the first research yarn, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the research, shared with the participant a copy of the participant information sheet and gained the participant’s written consent. Below the excerpt of research notes shows the researcher and participant engaged in a research yarn that then meandered between different modes of yarning.

Jenny: I don’t like this business of educators saying at a meeting to me ‘hey we got a couple of Aboriginal kids’. But what are you doing or not doing? It’s demeaning. It tells me something about their values and beliefs.

Researcher: Do you think then that one's beliefs and values influence one's ability to relate to Aboriginal children and families? In your view, is cultural competence important in the educational setting? (Question 3).

Jenny: It's actually the foundation, it's the building block, and if you don't have that what have you got? You need a solid foundation and understanding of culture otherwise it'll just fall through and kids will fall through the system, there's nothing strong to build anything on, it's like building a house in sand, it will just collapse ... You wonder why these kids don't get through, some do get through and that's good, that's resilience, you take your hat off to the kids that get through the system ... There is too much work within education using a deficit model; they look at us as if we are a deficit ... You know, the other day, a community member asked me 'why are you picking that little boy up?' I told this person 'hey this little Aboriginal boy might be living with a non-Aboriginal foster family but the Kindy bus picks this boy up because he has a right to be here with his people and learn about his culture because he's not getting it at home, he has to have connection'. (Participant begins sharing a story about community that was not relevant to the research topic).

**Social Yarn** – Jenny shares her understanding of the importance of culture for Aboriginal children within the education setting. Jenny then continues a discussion that was not relevant to the research topic. The researcher then strategically guided the conversation back to the research yarn.

Researcher: So, do you see part of your role as an Early Childhood educator to advocate for acknowledgment and respect of Aboriginal kinship structures?

Jenny: Yes, just thinking about kinship; teachers and children need to know the connections and how children interact with each other. So, part of building cultural competence is being aware of kinship principles within communities.

**Collaborative yarn** – Participant and researcher engage in a conversation about a proposed research project in the community that was not related to the research topic. Ideas about the project were shared. The researcher once again strategically guided the yarn back to the research.

Researcher: So, going back to what you were saying earlier, as an Aboriginal person you have that advantage in that you really know your community and kinship principles and practices, do you see this as a really important part of being a culturally competent educator?

Jenny: Yes, it is. Many years ago, when I began my studies in education, I started out doing a course at location so the more you learn the more you know, but even though it's through a white perspective at least through the Aboriginal studies unit at (location) it was well balanced and open. It was just a magnificent place and I felt comfortable, do you know what I mean? They had an understanding of kinship systems and the complexities surrounding it. Did you ever attend (location)?

Researcher: No, that was a bit before my time. It sounds like it was a very welcoming space. Was it managed by Aboriginal staff?

Jenny: Oh Yes, (name) was managing the course at that time and (name) was fantastic, she really made sure that Aboriginal students felt culturally safe and welcomed and if we had a problem with non-Aboriginal staff (name) always took the time to make us feel like we were not at fault and she would then speak to the staff member involved about the issues at hand.

Researcher: So, it really was a place where you felt culturally safe and sense of belonging. Do you think that now as a Leader in the field of early childhood you have that support? What I am really interested in is what structures have supported or constrained your work, and the work of your staff when applying culturally competent practices? (Question 5).

This yarn was long and weaved through the different modes of yarning. It was decided between the researcher and the participant at the end of the meeting that the other modes of yarning not directly related to the research topic would not be transcribed. As a researcher, I have honoured the participant's request and not included this anywhere throughout the research and documentation. This demonstrates that the researcher could gather rich in-depth descriptions from the participant and also felt that the space between researcher and participant was of a collaborative nature built on respect, understanding and reciprocity. This is reflected in my research journal where I noted after our yarn:

*I had another yarn today with Jenny. It felt really comfortable. Perhaps because the yarning process was authentic. We yarned first about family, then community, then work, then had the research yarn which went around in circles but using the yarning research question guide helped me bring the yarn back to the 'real' purpose of the yarn. I feel confident that although the yarn went around in circles at the time I gathered some really rich in-depth data from Jenny (September 2014).*

The yarn meandered and weaved through different modes of yarning. The participant requested that certain sections of our yarn not be recorded nor transcribed. As a researcher, I have a moral obligation to respect the participants' wishes. Equally, as an Aboriginal person I respect my family's wishes when yarning. For example, if I was told by one of my elders, 'Now this doesn't leave the room', no matter what he/she tells me, I have an

obligation to adhere to this request of confidentiality. This was no different throughout the research process of yarning through semi-structured interviews.

## ***5.2 Qualitative data analysis***

Once I had completed all semi-structured interviews, I began the process of transcribing the raw data from audio recordings to a Word document. While this was a very lengthy process it was also vitally important to immerse oneself in the data. I began by transcribing each audio recording inclusive of every spoken word to written text so that the written text was an exact replication of the spoken word. I also included all nonverbal cues including sighs, silences, laughter and tone. I undertook a second and third transcribing of each interview to ensure that all spoken text was included and took special care to note the specific language and chosen words of each participant. Additionally, after each interview the researcher recorded in a personal research journal reflections, impressions, wonderings, and concerns and noted some of the key ideas raised by the participants.

Data was analysed using an inductive qualitative method consisting of several stages. I drew on the work of Saldana (2009) to assist in the coding process. Saldana (2009, p. 8) explains coding as ‘primarily an interpretive act ... an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow’ (Saldana 2009, pp. 4–8). The first step involved reading and rereading the data and noting keywords and phrases to identify preliminary codes. I coded from paragraph level down to sentence level and just got deeper and deeper into the data. Recurring codes across the data were then grouped using a cut and sort method. Key phrases were then grouped into broad categories with the aid of a thematic map to view the links between developing themes (Bernard 2012). The primary purpose was to identify the discourses to inform and build theories (Saldana 2009 p. 26) about cultural competence. The following sections outline briefly the process undertaken to analyse the interview data.

### ***5.2.1 Initial open coding***

Audio records were transcribed onto a Microsoft Word document that included a right-hand side margin to place codes. Data collected from each participant were hand coded word by word, line by line initially to generate codes and to identify preliminary patterns; discrepancies in perspectives between participants and unexpected insights and issues. This necessitated a close reading of the data and the need to really immerse myself in it (Charmaz 2006, p. 57). Bernard (2012, p. 525) also suggests that by ‘just reading the texts and underlining or highlighting things as you go ... some of the words and phrases you

highlight will turn into names for themes’. The idea of open coding is to expose the theoretical possibilities in the data (Saldana 2009). This first stage of coding really was about recording ‘first impressions’ (Saldana 2009, p. 4) that represent the data and locating ‘repetitive patterns of actions and consistencies’ in the data (Saldana 2009, p. 5). During this phase, each transcript was analysed twice to draw out codes directly from the data. Codes were also taken directly from the participants’ transcripts and placed in quotation marks, these codes are referred to as in-vivo codes (Saldana 2009, p. 3). The purpose of using in-vivo codes was to ensure that the ideas represented stayed as close as possible to research participants’ own words to capture a key element of what was being described (Given 2008). In all over 80 codes were generated in the first screening of transcripts as displayed in Table 12.

| <b>Table of Prevalent Codes – Open coding</b> |               |                             |                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Competence                                    | Approaches    | Personal Constraints        | Feel                   |
| Children                                      | Acknowledging | Dialogue/discussions        | Context                |
| Learn                                         | “Journey”     | Talking                     | Collaborative approach |
| Culture                                       | Ability       | Dispositions                | “white”                |
| Understanding                                 | Time          | Practice                    | Differences            |
| Knowledge                                     | Listening     | Outcomes                    | Participate            |
| Importance                                    | Sharing       | Systems                     | Accountability         |
| Community                                     | Respectful    | Worldview                   | Deficit                |
| Families                                      | Others        | Question/Questioning        | Opportunities          |
| Being                                         | Perspectives  | Awareness                   | Honest                 |
| Learning                                      | Experiences   | Reflection/being reflective | Conversations          |
| Develop                                       | History       | “Tokenistic practices”      | Connecting             |
| Respect                                       | Process       | Perceptions                 | Adapting               |
| Become                                        | Believe       | Possibilities               | Experience             |
| Thinking                                      | Constraints   | Passive                     | Role of educators      |
| Identity                                      | Open          | Honour                      | Challenging            |
| Conversation                                  | Holistic      | Attitudes                   | History                |

|               |                 |                       |                     |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Beliefs       | Adapting        | Aboriginal            | Colonisation        |
| Reflect       | Empathy         | Inclusive             | Changes             |
| Relationships | Privilege       | “Proactive”           | Lens/lenses         |
| Support       | Reciprocity     | Diversity of cultures | Values              |
| Growing       | Western systems | Responsibility        | “Systemic barriers” |

**Table 12: Table of prevalent codes – open coding**

The codes of ‘competence’, ‘children’, ‘learn’, ‘culture’ and ‘understanding’ were the most prevalent recurring codes throughout the open coding process. The researcher then moved onto second level coding.

### **5.2.2 Second level coding**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to second level coding as axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 96) describe axial coding as ‘a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by ‘utilizing a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences’ (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 96). Following Saldana’s (2009) suggestions and Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) description of axial coding, the second stage involved focussing on the initial codes and organising them in a coherent manner to create categories from the patterns that emerged out of initial open coding. It is at this stage that coding is not about just labelling – it is also about linking categories (Saldana 2009, p. 7) through a process of ‘sifting and sorting’ (Lichtman 2006, p. 164) and looking for relationships between the categories.

This stage of coding was also time consuming as it required a very deep level of thinking and reflection and connecting with previous codes within the context of the rich elaborate transcripts. This meant going back and forth between each transcript and locating initial codes within the context of what each participant was talking about. This process assisted the researcher to minimise replication and remove repetitive codes and categories, thereby reducing the data to a more manageable level. Table 13 below highlights the emerging categories from second level coding.

| <b>Emerging categories from axial coding</b> |                         |                       |                      |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>1) Culture</b>                            | <b>2)Children</b>       | <b>3)Experiences</b>  | <b>4)Constraints</b> |
| Understandings of                            | Families                | Listening             | Time constraints     |
| Perspectives of                              | Community               | Learning              | Systems thinking     |
| Learning about                               | Collaborations          | Commitment            | Outcome's based      |
| Relationships/Reciprocity                    | Identity                | Beginning the Journey | Rhetoric             |
| <b>5)Knowledge</b>                           | <b>6)Educators Role</b> | <b>7)Questioning</b>  | <b>8)Support</b>     |
| Of Families                                  | Understanding culture   | Challenging oneself   | Thinking time        |
| Of Communities                               | Acknowledging culture   | Possibilities         | Conversations        |
| Through Conversations                        | Collaborating           | Being open            |                      |
| Thinking                                     | Critical thinking       | Process               |                      |

**Table 13: Emerging categories from axial coding.**

At this stage, major codes were reorganised, categories developed and preliminary themes identified. The researcher also utilised in-vivo codes, specific words or phrases directly from participants' text to inform the development of possible themes. From these codes, secondary codes or categories were established. This process was vital and required working closely with the data to make connections amongst the different categories to propose new themes. This process continued until codes and categories were worked to generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings (Creswell 2003, p. 9).

### ***5.3 Summary of themes***

Once all the data was coded and categorised, it was then organised into themes. Codes collected from the open-coding process were collated into a list. I then sorted these codes into potential categories by manually sorting codes from print transcripts and placing them on a larger sheet of paper according to that category. The researcher used the insights from this data analysis process to inform the next iteration of analysis. This then led onto further refining of categories and developing potential themes. A theme has been described by Saldana (2009) as an 'outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection' (Saldana 2009, p. 13). When I reached the stage of developing themes I constantly referred to the codes and second stage categories to ensure that there was evidence to support them. Rigorous examination of codes and categories to inform the development of themes was

based on portraying ‘something important about the data in relation to the research questions’ that ‘represents some level of patterned response or meaning with the data set’ (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 10).

The first stage open coding generated more than 80 codes. The researcher then organised these into ten categories, which were then reduced to eight categories. These were then organised into three themes. This process fits in with Creswell’s (2009) suggestion of ‘the researcher collects qualitative data, analyses it for themes or perspectives, and reports 4-5 themes’ (Creswell 2009, p. 184). Themes were selected that were most relevant to the research questions and to which there was substantial data. Analysis of the data revealed several main themes emerging from the perspectives of educators and which correlated with the big ideas evident in the research questions:

- 1) What are educators’ understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence as outlined in the EYLF? and
- 2) How do educators describe their proficiency with cultural competence?

The generated themes are outlined below:

1. Ways of knowing: the normalisation of cultural competence
2. Ways of being: policy as paradox
3. Ways of doing: being open to possibilities

After the major themes had been shaped, I took each theme and treated it as a separate chapter of the research. It became apparent that each theme required further engagement with research and writing on cultural competence. I drew inspiration from Aboriginal scholar Karen Martin (2003) and her points on ways of knowing, being and doing as metaphors to frame the discussion chapters.

#### ***5.4 Role of the researcher***

At the beginning of the analysis, it became apparent to me that I may have used a subjective gaze on the data and highlighted categories that I was interested in, categories that had meaning to me and my interests. I was in effect exploring my subjective interpretations of the transcripts influenced by my own experiences in the broader context of my life. A valid analysis requires an impartial and detached reading of the transcript. Consequently, researcher reflexivity was an important issue throughout the process of analysing data. As noted in a journal entry:

*I just finished listening to another yarn and as I started reflecting on the words of the participant I realised that I was putting my perspective on the data, and making judgements and conclusions that could be misconstrued. I made a mental note to myself that I need to be very careful about my own perceptions influencing the data. I think that at times my interpretations will be very different to the participants and it will require numerous readings of the transcripts with an objective mind.*

I constructed a list of questions to keep by my side as I was coding and immersing myself in the data. During the analysis process, I made a point to focus on the following areas:

- What was said?
- How was it said?
- What was not said?
- Whose interests were served by the telling of a yarn in a particular way?
- What do these yarns say about issues of power, discourse and marginalisation in education?
- What do these yarns say about the possibilities of change?
- Did I play a role in influencing and constructing these yarns?
- Did I perpetuate any discourse based on my own perceptions and biases?
- Would another researcher be able to replicate the analysed data?

The analysis involved undertaking re-readings of the transcripts to allow for distinguished features of the discourse to emerge without my preconceptions influencing the process. This involved reading the transcripts multiple times over a period, in effect to pick up nuances that may have been missed previously. I found that taking time to engage in this process numerous times enabled the reduction of data and the formation of the most significant themes.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a description of the analysis process for the semi-structured interviews. In summary, open initial coding generated over 80 codes; second level coding generated eight categories. Third level analysis involved the refining of categories into three themes. The entire process was reiterative and cyclic as meticulous care was paid to language, patterns, consistencies and inconsistencies for emergent themes to develop. Throughout the process the researcher maintained reflexivity and utilised a list of questions to ensure that researcher bias and preconceptions did not influence the outcomes of the data analysis. Three themes were drawn from the data and are framed using Karen Martin's

(2003) ways of knowing, being and doing as metaphors to frame the following three discussion chapters:

Ways of knowing: the normalisation of cultural competence;

Ways of being: policy as paradox and

Ways of doing: being open to possibilities.

The next chapter discusses the first theme – ‘Ways of knowing: the normalisation of cultural competence’.

## **CHAPTER SIX: Ways of knowing: the normalisation of cultural competence**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The primary aim of this research was to explore educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. This was achieved through a combination of methodological approaches and Indigenous practices to represent valid findings in a balanced praxis (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, p. 143). The previous chapters described the process in which the three themes were inductively drawn from the data and that enabled the showcasing of participants' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. The three themes are discussed in chapters six, seven and eight:

Ways of knowing: the normalisation of cultural competence;

Ways of being: policy as paradox; and

Ways of doing: being open to possibilities.

The research themes reflect prominent Aboriginal researcher Karen Martin's (2003) framework: 'Ways of being, knowing and doing'. As highlighted in Chapter Two, Karen Martin argues that our ways of knowing and being are inseparable from our ways of doing and each informs the other, thus, emphasizing relatedness (Martin 2003). I have taken the stance that educators' ways of knowing, being and doing are enmeshed in personal meaning, values and practices. This framework provides a structure to articulate the participants' ways of knowing, being and doing in relation to their understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence. The review of research in Chapter Two highlighted that dominant discursive regimes work to construct concepts and describe a reality that advantages some and disadvantages others. Furthermore, knowledge is a social construct and we are active constructors in the process of developing knowledge (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 2007). Fisher similarly addresses knowing and not knowing:

We are always in a state of incomplete knowledge, of coming to know, of building on our partial understandings. Throughout life, we are (or should be) constantly developing our conceptual understanding of the world. (Fisher 1995, p. 63)

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007, p. 30) assert that knowledge shapes our understandings of the world by offering descriptions that we understand to be the truth which leads to competing and contested understandings. For instance, as highlighted in Chapter Two (section 2.4), some discourses normalise deficit thinking that represents Aboriginal

children as inferior to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Knowledge is not pure or neutral but a matter of perspective and is implicated in what Foucault refers to as ‘regimes of power’ (Foucault 1980 cited in Barker 2012, p. 30). A poststructural stance in this research advocates a position of constantly questioning, reflecting and deepening our understandings about cultural competence. There is no one way of knowing, being and doing in relation to cultural competence but having conversations enables us to develop new understandings to inform our pedagogy. For this reason, I have transcribed participants spoken words without changes so that they can be ‘listened’ to and understood without re-interpretation, in their original truth. I aim to not make generalisations from the data but to ‘sing up many truths/narratives’ to privilege the participants’ lived experiences (Byrne-Armstrong 2001, p.112). It was also important that I presented the participants’ voices with respect and humility to share their journeys.

Throughout the following three discussion chapters, there will be inclusion of the Cultural Competence Q sort data where appropriate (see section 4.3). All Q sort participants were invited to explain their reasons for choosing the statements with which they ‘strongly agreed’ and ‘strongly disagreed’ with. Ample space was provided in the online Q sort for participants to provide responses if they so desired. Only four participants who undertook the Q sort included written responses to complement their Q sort. Together with the semi-structured interview data, this chapter will highlight the connections between educators’ understandings of cultural competence and how through the process of reflection they personalise their standpoint to authorise such knowledge. Where appropriate, I aim to cast doubt on persuasive discourses of cultural competence that potentially work to position Aboriginal children and peoples as inferior; the ‘Other’; and as a ‘competency’ to achieve. The organising theme of this chapter, ‘Ways of knowing: the normalisation of cultural competence’ is underpinned by concepts of ‘understanding’, ‘knowledge’, ‘learning’, ‘relationships’, ‘communities’, and ‘reflection’. The first section (6.2) begins with participants own understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Second, given this context, I deliberate on educators’ perspectives on the multidimensionality of privilege (6.3). Third, educator’s illumination of reflective practice as a means to understanding cultural competence will be discussed (6.4). The next section brings to the fore educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence.

## ***6.2 Understanding Cultural Competence***

There is an emphasis throughout the following three chapters on ‘understanding’ as a concept. The term ‘understanding’ is fraught with tension as it is clearly a psychological

construct. 'Understanding' as a relational concept is concerned with categories of psychological concepts such as 'grasping', 'comprehending' and 'knowing' about a topic all of which is closely related to notions of intelligence. Additionally, we can also refer to dispositions and abilities as notions of understanding. There are also differing levels of understanding for example, 'shallow' and 'deep' understanding. The term is clearly subjective and interpretive, however the intention in this research is to not place judgement on participants' perceived understandings or quantify their understanding. It is more about enabling participants to grapple, reflect upon and critique their understandings and perspectives related to the concept of cultural competence.

There are many definitions of cultural competence. For example, Paula, one of the research participants, made it very clear that she was uncertain about 'defining' cultural competence stating that:

I think that one of the things that I struggle with is that we are sort of quick to put very slick definitions and we use it. When it actually comes to interpretation, you're really two people [that] could be having a conversation and actually be talking about completely different things. (Paula)

Paula was determined not to provide a single definition of cultural competence but was happy to explore her understandings of what it might be. Paula elaborates further by stating that:

What I am particularly interested in, is always starting from the child and what the child is, what the child knows and what the child's connections and families and experiences are. And by that very nature it's totally different for everybody. For me as an educator, I tend to take cultural competence as an opportunity to listen and learn and share, and so it's about unwrapping and consolidating a growing understanding of what the child's connections and lifestyles and knowledge is and then sharing that. (Paula)

Paula makes a very important point here in that she takes learning about cultural competence as an opportunity to grow her understanding. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) remind us that an important feature of human existence is the quest or desire to seek understanding and attempt to make meaning and sense of the unfamiliar. As noted in the introduction, Fisher (1995, p. 61) highlights that: 'we are always in a state of incomplete knowledge, of coming to know, of building on our partial understandings'. Paula demonstrates that she draws on available opportunities to deepen her understanding of cultural competence and consider what this means for her as an educator. This contrasts with Joan who explains that her understanding of cultural competence has changed over time:

My understanding of cultural competence has changed a lot in the last few years and while I would probably say I don't have an in depth understanding of it, what I feel like is that it is based around relationships. (Joan)

Both Joan and Paula signified relationships as core in developing cultural competence. The scholarship around cultural competence in the early years of education also affirms that relationships are at the heart of being culturally competent. The research reviewed previously (section 2.5) highlights that relationships are at the core of effective pedagogy. Both Bronfenbrenner (1986) and Birch and Ladd (1997) affirm that educator-child relationships and educator-family relationships is a priority in early childhood as this clearly informs children and families' sense of being and belonging within the early childhood setting. By way of an example, the EYLF identifies secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships with children as one of the principles that underpin practice (DEEWR 2010). Educators' practices and the relationships they form with children and families have a significant effect on children's involvement and success in learning (DEEWR 2010). Building caring, responsive and nurturing relationships with children, families and communities are therefore significant. When educators develop respectful relationships with children, families and communities, they can work collaboratively and holistically to construct learning experiences relevant to the children in their local context. Jenny, an Aboriginal early childhood educator, also provided her understanding of the importance of relationships to cultural competence:

I think to me cultural competence is using a holistic approach being inclusive and being non-judgemental and coming from that strength based approach and it's also around, the really important part of cultural competency is the relationships you build with children. (Jenny)

Similarly, for Kate, cultural competence was the ability:

To be able to understand, reflect, build knowledge [and] relationships which is all part of probably the EYLF but in my own sense of my own meaning of my relationships that I have with people that I might work with. So, it's really not judging, its being responsive and respectful. (Kate)

Kate highlighted being able to understand and build knowledge to be responsive and respectful. Moreover, June took this idea further where she recites the EYLF and other models of cultural competence that a focus on attitudes (being non-judgemental), skills (using a holistic approach) and knowledge (coming from a strength based approach) (DEEWR 2010; SNAICC 2012). Importantly, she described cultural competence as:

having the skills, knowledge and attitude to be able to work proactively with Aboriginal people. It is also about the individual, systems or whole of organisation

approach to ensure that every aspect of the organisations operations are inclusive of Aboriginal people and are not tacked on as an afterthought. (June)

A holistic approach considers the physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of individuals. A holistic approach may also mean decolonising ourselves and our practices and recognising that our shared history matters (see for example Tuhiwai Smith 1999). A strength based approach means taking responsibility to learn about this history and the ongoing acts of colonisation in the communities in which we work (Bennett, Green, Gilbert & Bessarab 2013). This is particularly relevant for educators in early childhood education, where the legacy of the Stolen Generations<sup>15</sup> continues to impact on the families we may work with.

Kate and June both described cultural competence as a way of knowing but failed to mention the deeper reflection required to disrupt systemic ways of being and doing that influenced their thinking and perspectives. In contrast, Joan placed significant emphasis on developing relationships as a significant factor in cultural competence. The importance of relationships between educator, families and communities is discussed in more depth in the following sections. Kate mentioned ‘understanding’ and reflected upon her ‘own sense of meaning’ concerning the relationships she has with people. Similarly, Ruth emphasised cultural competence as being about understanding. Ruth described cultural competence:

I think it goes deeper, I absolutely agree with growing educators’ competence ... maybe it should be understanding, because understanding embraces a whole lot more than just competence. (Ruth)

The term ‘understanding’ as a relational concept does entail more than ‘knowing’. It requires delving deep within and questioning and disrupting the normalised narrative and problematising assumptions around the meanings of powerful concepts. Taking time to critically examine concepts enlightens our perspectives of issues that are of relevance to the children, families and communities we work with. Deep reflection and conversations are an opportunity ‘to create a disturbance, to avoid stagnation, and to continue to challenge ourselves and others’ (Lyon et al 2006, p. 16 cited in Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez 2015, p. 13). Ruth further affirmed that she grappled with the term ‘cultural competence’ and stated:

I am actually challenged a little bit by the word cultural competence. (Ruth)

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<sup>15</sup> Stolen Generations refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed from their families by Federal and State government agencies pursuant to the legislation under which they acted (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 1997).

Ruth problematised the concept of cultural competence by questioning the different terminology equated to the concept of cultural competence:

You know there's cultural understanding [and] there's cultural awareness. I was thinking about this in the context of say some of my colleagues who are educators in schools and identify as non-Aboriginal and I know in some contexts the community don't necessarily see them as appropriate in that field of work, but they are in that field of work that I'm sure that if they go and fill in a job application will actually document their sense of cultural competency or expertise based on their experience. But who determines that someone is culturally competent? (Ruth)

Ruth raised important questions in relation to understanding cultural competence, firstly, about who determines that someone is culturally competent; secondly, how one acquires cultural expertise. Expertise is viewed as the equivalent to competence. It is important to consider how this could be translated across multiple contexts. There is an assumption of 'knowing' that regulates difference and diversity as a regime of truth. Ruth suggested the need to challenge reductive notions that suggest one can 'know' and 'be competent' and proficient in cultural competence. Ruth also portrayed an issue of 'sameness' where the idea of cultural competence in her observations has been a blanket of disadvantage for the Aboriginal students and the community she works in. Ruth's concern is that cultural competence has become normalised and authorised as practice that stifles the possibility of undertaking reflection and learning. Burbules (2002) refers to educators undertaking a shared quest of developing knowledge and understanding and argues that:

Whenever any pedagogical practice or relation becomes 'naturalized' and comes to be seen as the only possibility, the best possibility or the most 'politically correct' possibility, it becomes an impediment to human freedom, diversity, exploration, and – therefore – the possibilities of learning and discovery. (Burbules 2002, p. 266)

Burbules (2002) position affirms Ruth's points that concepts related to cultural competence can become normalised and stagnant. Ruth mentions the different terminology related to cultural competence so too does Sally who equates her understanding of cultural competence to notions of knowledge, knowing and awareness. Sally reflected that for an educator to be culturally competent they must:

have an understanding of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander ways of being. There must be an understanding and awareness of family structures, relationships, practices, language and accept difference is ok. (Sally)

What is problematic here is the reinforcing of the concept of difference. For Sally, cultural competence was seen as knowing about Aboriginal culture based on an assumption that Aboriginal culture is different. 'Difference' can be taken to be an effective code word that normalizes 'binaries'; an 'us and them' approach entrenched in a perspective that

normalizes the status quo by ‘othering’ groups perspectives and knowledges that are not perceived as the norm (Castagno 2014, p. 81). Castagno (2014) further explains that acknowledging differences between people results in the acceptance of the status quo. It is important to contextualise and situate the knowledge within larger contexts of how power, institutions and our everyday pedagogical practices work to not only create but to also maintain ‘difference’ (Castagno 2014, p. 119).

This is evident in the current early year’s curriculum. The EYLF points specifically to ‘differences’. Culturally competent educators are described in the EYLF as educators who ‘respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 16). The EYLF refers to differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures which can work to perpetuate the status quo. There is also an obvious unexamined relationship of power that works to maintain existing power relations that are based on privilege. This will be further examined in the following section (section 6.3). Nevertheless, despite the reassuring and ‘inclusive’ tone of the EYLF, the scholarship around Aboriginal children within the education system is fraught with inequities. The display of well-intended efforts to address ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’ has resulted in a manifestation of ‘saviours’ who can ‘fix’ students (Castagno 2014, p. 112). This is linked to a deficit framework which is clearly evidenced in the history of Aboriginal education as discussed in Chapter Two. Experienced early childhood Director Joan articulated her understanding of culture as a vital aspect of her understanding of cultural competence sharing that:

The culture competence learning for me is very much people based, previously I used to think you could just get it from books or the internet and its actually ‘Culture’ with a big C, they ... we were actually talking about traditions back then, but cultural competence has now for me becomes about making meaning with other people.  
(Joan)

Joan’s view here represents the idea of developing shared meaning collaboratively with other people. It is about acknowledging the great diversity of meaning about cultural competence and what this means and also acknowledging that there is more than one way of interpreting and representing cultural competence. Hall (1997, p. 3) notes that ‘meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part’. At times this meaning benefits the status quo and normalizes discourse that positions Aboriginal peoples as deficit to the mainstream. Joan elaborates on her perspective and mentions authentic connecting with people which is important in

developing relationships and moving from a position of not knowing to a position of being informed. Joan explained cultural competence as:

not about I want to learn about others so I can take that knowledge and go teach somebody else it. It's about authentic connecting with other people which may support my understanding and learning. It's not meant to be 'I want to learn from you so I become an expert or anything'. What I came to realise was how little I knew of Aboriginal people and culture and the same for a variety of other cultures. (Joan)

Joan's perspective is informative and follows the argument outlined in Chapter Two that there is a need to move away from a dominant regime of truth to ways of knowing that are informed through reciprocity, relationships and learning from and with Aboriginal families and communities. Joan's representation here of listening as pedagogy to learn is particularly significant. A pedagogy of listening, as discussed in Chapter Three (3.7), is core to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. Joan is suggesting that we shift our representations from the idea of an 'expert' who explores, probes and emphasises the 'inferior' status of Aboriginal peoples to a position of collaborative learning. Joan reflected on previous pedagogical approaches:

When I think about my teaching, the very tokenistic approach at the beginning of my teaching career about the fact we've got Indian and Asians families here and I'll learn a little bit about their culture which then means I'm culturally competent. That was my thinking once. (Joan)

Joan subtly admits that her previous constructions and representations of culture and the 'other' was a dominant regime to subordinate 'others'. This type of thinking and way of knowing has serious implications for pedagogy and relationships with Aboriginal children.

There appears to be a shared understanding amongst the participants related to the notion of cultural competence. It was evident that some of the participants grappled with articulating what cultural competence meant to them. Sue (2003, p. 969) points out 'cultural competency is difficult to define because it is contextually based rather than technique specific'. What is apparent in this dialogue is a hope that we can continue to learn about the world, ourselves and each other. This is in line with Pease's (2002) idea who suggests that there is a need to 'challenge the status of their [our] own professional knowledge and consider the extent to which their [our] narratives retain traces of dominant discourses' (Pease 2002, p. 142). It is about focussing on entrenched values and notions and dismantling issues of power, privilege and oppression. Dudgeon (2000) affirms that a 'critical starting point for the practitioner is to look inward – to take responsibility for gaining cultural awareness and sensitivity, not only toward people of another cultural group, but also toward their own culture' (Dudgeon 2000, p. 249). This thesis argues that in

place of examining the ‘other’, cultural competence also includes an examination of our own position in society and develop a critical capacity to interrogate how privilege plays out through concepts including that of cultural competence. The next section highlights how some participants have navigated around the complexity and multidimensionality of privilege to better inform their ways of knowing.

### ***6.3 The multidimensionality of privilege***

The previous section reviewed how some of the participants delved and challenged the discourse of cultural competence by either disrupting or unknowingly supporting the normalised view about ‘others’ and ‘difference’. Supporting this stance, Castagno (2014) affirms that notions of sameness and diversity, although seen as good intentions, perpetuate othering that privilege the individual and the status quo. The individual in this research refers to educators. In discussing privilege, I draw on Baileys (1998) definition who frames privilege as ‘systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups with access to resources and institutional power that are beyond the common advantages of marginalized citizens’ (Bailey 1998, p. 109). Participant’s understandings of cultural competence reflect an uncertainty of understanding the concepts that work towards maintaining the status quo that normalizes deficit assumptions of Aboriginal people. This discourse related to diversity and difference perpetuate privilege, and more specifically, whiteness and white privilege. Similarly, Gillborn (2015, p. 278) maintains that whiteness ‘refers to a set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices that place the interests and perspectives of White people at the center of what is considered normal and everyday’. Aboriginal scholar Moreton-Robinson (2004, p. vii) defines whiteness as ‘the invisible norm against which other races are judged in the construction of identity, representation, subjectivity, nationalism and the law’. The two definitions point to the system, beliefs, norms and practices that shape the foundations of society and that work to legitimise the centrality of whiteness.

Chapter Two discussed how entrenched dominant paradigms, discourses and practices was reflected in the history of education for Aboriginal peoples. This was evidenced in the distribution of resources and privileges afforded to the status quo. This foregrounds whiteness, which is theorized as a location of ‘structural advantage’ (Schech & Haggis 2004, p. 180). There are many examples of the function and privileges of whiteness. In educational settings, the cultural norms and practices of ‘whites’ are valued above others and form the discourse of which all others are evaluated (Castagno, 2014). This is apparent with the term ‘cultural competence’. These dominant practices and discourses generate an

‘authoritative consensus about what needs to be done ... and how it should be done’ and it is represented as a regime of truth (Gore 1993 cited in Mac Naughton 2005, p. 30). As discussed in the review of the research, overall education in Australia favours a regime that does not value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, practices or norms. Western knowledge systems are embedded in the curriculum and imposed daily with little respect of Indigenous knowledges. This is but one privilege of whiteness that works as a regime of truth to maintain inequity.

Peggy McIntosh (2011) in her seminal essay on white privilege uses the metaphor of an ‘invisible knapsack’ to describe the ways in which ‘whites’ benefit from their privileged status. Additionally, according to Macintosh within the ‘knapsack’ are unearned benefits that work to sustain ‘whites’ in a position of dominance in all aspects of society. Early childhood educator Mary shared her understanding of whiteness and privilege:

I looked at the impact of “white race privilege” which I hadn’t considered or even thought about before. I hadn’t realised that by accepting the ways things are done, taught and shared meant that we are actually accepting privilege in many different ways, while ‘other’ cultural groups struggle. So, my journey towards growing cultural competence began. I began to recognise that I have an element of racism in me, in the fact that I haven’t acknowledged my privilege and recognised what my privilege has meant for other people who are viewed as “different” from the ‘norm’.  
(Mary)

Mary signifies in her use of ‘accepting the way things are done’ that she was unaware of the privilege she was granted based on her position as a non-Aboriginal person in society. Bell hooks (1994) affirms that a key feature of whiteness is its state of unconsciousness, that is, whiteness and its associated privileges are often invisible to white people and this in turn perpetuates a lack of understanding of oppression. Mary acknowledged that she began to recognise racism and what this meant for her as a non-Aboriginal person. She does not articulate her feelings about or contextualise her journey of understanding whiteness but what she does do is name it for what it is and acknowledges that everyday experiences for her are the norm which maintain inequity by protecting whiteness (Castagno 2014, p. 85).

Another participant, Ruth, was also vocal in her attempts to share her perspective on whiteness as it relates to understanding cultural competence. Ruth in sharing a conversation she had with a colleague stated that:

Sometimes I feel like I have to put my white skin aside in order to understand and I said I’m not sure what the terminology is, and part of that is around deep empathy, wanting to take on somebody else’s perspective and I realise that I cannot change my whiteness but I can recognise white race privilege and she just said well that’s called transformational thinking. So, I suppose by being part of a community that I have

had to transform my thinking but part of it is still recognising that privilege that comes with the colour of my skin. (Ruth)

Although Ruth has good intentions, her whiteness is protected. Part of the transformational thinking that she refers to would also require dismantling whiteness and working towards challenging the status quo to inform systemic change. Ruth refers to ‘putting her white skin aside’ to understand, but she also recognises the idea to be nearly impossible. As discussed above, cultural competence should be about challenging those dominant discourses that enable and promote actions, thoughts and knowledge that work to constrain others. To not do so contributes to normalising discourses and practices. This then becomes so entrenched and invisible within society that for some people it becomes difficult to even recognise let alone change. By way of an example, Gillborn (2008, pp. 168–169) affirms that ‘whiteness is an ever-present regime of control and classification that saturates society; it is present in the moment-to-moment, seemingly random and intensely personal interactions and thoughts that shape our lives’. There are countless examples of marginalising and inequitable practices within schooling for Aboriginal students across Australia. Unfortunately, the research points out that it does not appear to be a conversation that many educators have. Paula, another experienced early year’s educator, reflected on her work in ways that this benefits the interests of the status quo and that of the system:

I think that the biggest problem that we have as educators is that we use a very white centric way of thinking about things and a white centric way of sharing information in an Aboriginal culture that doesn’t work that way. So, we look at things and put our headset on them and it’s not right, and yet we are constantly trying to mould and shape and push things into an education system that often runs very counter to the deep knowledge and traditions and learning of a lot of Aboriginal people and I don’t think that a lot of teachers get that. (Paula)

Paula clearly articulated her perspective that there is a hierarchy of privilege and a view of deficit in the system. In addition, some ways of working support the status quo which oppress Aboriginal peoples. This oppression is evident in systems and policies that continue to disadvantage Aboriginal peoples and maintain white privilege. Delpit (1993) refers to this as the ‘culture of power’ and is in line with the work of Castagno (2014, p. 115) who also contends that education systems work in ways that appeal to ‘White, middle-class families’. Paula seems to be aware of her own Whiteness, and additionally, describes how inequality and discrimination are perpetuated within a system that claims to be fair and equal. An understanding of how power over others and how the status quo dominates the social arena appears to be missing from some participants’ understandings of cultural competence. Paula distances herself from any mention of the larger societal power structures that continuously work to reinforce white privilege (Vaught & Castagno 2008, p.

99). This contrasts with early childhood educator Laura who shares an alternative narrative of how she contests hegemonic policy stating that:

My colleagues and I are always seeking ways to understand ourselves and those around us. Every policy that is created is discussed in terms of its ethical construct and whose voice and values it favours. We discuss the pedagogy of the oppressed (Paulo Friere) and how it remains in our wealthy Western democracy because there is one image of the child – an image of a white child who has skills and abilities to fit into the existing Leviathan. (Laura)

Laura referred to Paulo Freire (1970) and the ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ and questioned the value of whose voice is heard and favoured. Laura takes a critical pedagogical stance and highlights how policies embedded within the institutional structures represent ‘judgments about what knowledge counts, legitimates specific social relations, defines agency in particular ways, and always presupposes a particular notion of the future’ (Giroux 2011, p. 7). What is highlighted here is the invisible power of normalization that privileges the dominant discourse. This ‘sameness’ mentioned by Laura is a master-narrative that continually contributes to maintain the status quo. In sharing a narrative about the notion of ‘sameness’, Ruth also shared that:

One of the biggest challenges where I think people can understand cultural competence as recognising sameness when I actually think it’s about recognising and celebrating difference. So, when you hear people [say] ‘yeah, I have friends and they’re Aboriginal’; yes, but what does that mean? Or others say, ‘I don’t see the colour of your skin’; but no hang on you should see the colour of the skin and even if, and that’s metaphorically because not all Aboriginal people ...there are still varying stages that, If I said to *so and so* I don’t see the colour of your skin, well hang on it’s a bit obvious, really, why wouldn’t I see the colour of your skin. (Ruth)

In this narrative Ruth is sharing that her teachers have a genuine curiosity about diversity and they engage the issues in nice pleasant ways (Castagno 2014, p. 47). The research participants who undertook the Cultural Competence Q sort reveal similar perspectives about the colour-blindness regime. By way of an example, participants were asked to rank order a set of statements into a distribution grid ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Thus, participants had to decide rankings per their personal understandings and perspectives about given statements. For statement 27, *‘I don’t see colour or culture in my service; my programs and practices are inclusive of all children regardless of culture’*, four participants rated this statement along the ‘agree’ continuum of the Q sort. 11 participants rated this statement along the ‘disagree’ continuum. Two participants were neutral. This is the epitome of white privilege and colour-blind discrimination. This is reflected in the statement that ‘all children’ are included which is premised on discourses related to inclusivity and neutrality that ‘reifies whiteness’ (Castagno 2014, p. 50). Not

surprisingly, although well intentioned, the participant's alliance with colour-blind perspectives preserves inequity and perpetuates deficit ideologies (Castagno 2014, p. 73).

Although many participants had opportunity to disrupt and question such ideologies, there was no mention of strategies on how to break down and dismantle the core structures and ways of thinking that contribute to practices that promote inequity. Castagno (2014) refers to this as 'dancing between valuing sameness on the one hand and difference on the other hand' and further contends that this is a 'common manifestation of whiteness' (Castagno 2014, p. 47). This is an example of perpetuating uniformity. The participants' narratives share some of their ways of knowing that contribute to marginalising practices through conversation. There is a wealth of attempts to 'understanding', for instance June stated that:

Educators need to have an understanding of what they bring into an educational setting and how sometimes their experiences and perceptions may impact on the families and children that they support ... it's important that they [educators] participate and engage in respectful conversations. All educators for instance need to learn about Australia's true history, that is colonisation and the impacts of colonisation, the policies that were enforced upon Aboriginal people, the certificates that Aboriginal people had to carry to say they were 'now white' and not Aboriginal. Also, the massacres that occurred across Australia. People need to have that understanding, not to feel guilty, but to acknowledge and respect the intergenerational trauma that some Aboriginal families' may experience now. (June)

June contends that educators should participate and engage in respectful conversations to address and challenge negative understandings. Conversation that is purely just a discussion is void of any meaning if it does not contribute to systemic social change for equity. June is also concerned that educators learn more about the history of dispossession and its associated acts and policies that aimed to 'protect', 'exclude' and 'control' Aboriginal peoples. Ruth elaborates further and mentions accountability in developing an understanding of Australia's history:

I think working in this community has increased my sense of accountability and responsibility for a shared history of Australia which includes our First Nations people and having a shared history so you know belonging is central to being. Even for me as an adult I belong to this country called Australia, but where does my sense of a shared history start? So, growing educators' competence in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures I think they have to have an understanding of the history of Australia within the context of themselves and then think about the shared history and own it in order for them to effect change. (Ruth)

Ruth persuasively suggests that having a deeper understanding of the history of Australia would challenge exclusionary practices and perspectives. This research supports the notion of educators learning more about Australia's history and bringing about greater awareness of dispossession, the continuing disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal peoples and the

need to address disadvantage. This will require that we move our attention away from the stories told by ‘former colonists’ as this discursively positions Aboriginal peoples as needing to be managed and regulated (Langton 1993, p. 33). The point is that the importance of Australia’s history cannot be ignored and it sets the scene for contemporary Australian dominant narratives. Kate, alerts us to the idea that perhaps there are not many conversations or sharing of dialogue around the true history of Australia. Kate detailed:

It’s not a conversation that’s out there, but if you’re working in sites that actually don’t have Aboriginal families I think it’s a conversation that isn’t necessarily raised. We certainly have an understanding of the history and the nature of things and in terms of the Australian curriculum it’s in there around and whatever it said in the Australian Curriculum around ... I can’t remember the exact phrase to describe that, but I think it is important. I think there probably needs more importance generally.  
(Kate)

Kate is assertive in her stance that dialogue around the history of Australia may not be a conversation ‘that is out there’. There is also a subtle suggestion that this is more so if the education site has no Aboriginal students. The EYLF advocates that the first and foremost aspect in implementing the curriculum framework is to become aware and grow our knowledge and understanding of the ‘unique place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures hold in Australia’ (Goodwin 2012, p 14). This is without critiquing and questioning the normalised ‘regime of truth’ that governs our thinking. What this does is perpetuate a stance, a way of knowing and producing of knowledge that benefits the status quo. There could be a disruption to sameness and colour-blind discourses but there is a continuity of discursive repertoires related to cultural awareness and cultural competence that have emerged to replace and re-affirm the colonial view that ‘Aboriginality ... [is] a problem to be solved’ (Dodson 1994, p. 3). This is in keeping with Foucault’s (cited in Mac Naughton 2005, p. 147) argument that the past and present are ‘intimately and politically connected; and that these connections produce contested and overlapping ways of thinking and being in our world’. However, this does little to disrupt the discursive dimensions of the dominant culture. Regardless of the change in terminology in relation to cultural competence, Frankenberg (1993) notes that shifting or disrupting discourse means that the emergence of one discourse does not actually eliminate the preceding discourse.

Ruth is of the view that ‘leaders have a bigger responsibility on understanding their educators’ worldview’. In saying this, Ruth highlights that we should all be interrogating what we know and how we come to know it, thereby becoming more self-reflective in our approaches to understanding as a critical underpinning to growth and learning which is central to culturally competent practice. Furthermore, concerning reflection and

worldviews, the Q sort participants rated statement 14 *'My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs'* high along the continuum to strongly agree. 12 participants strongly agreed as compared to four who overall strongly disagreed. Only two were neutral in their response to this statement. Participant 14 shared her reflections:

Knowing and acknowledging one's own world view is the basis for all reflective practice. (Q Sort – Participant 14)

Reflective practice is recognised by the Australian Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care organisation (SNAICC) as an essential component to developing cultural competence (SNAICC 2012, p. 6). The next section in this chapter highlights the participants views that relate to reflective practice and how reflections can work to authorise and shape understandings of multiple and competing discourses. This is significant as these multiple and competing discourse inform teaching practices, and these meanings affect 'differing effects of power' (Ryan & Grieshaber 2005, p. 39).

#### ***6.4 Developing a reflective culture***

Reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, and ethics to question and explore our professional practice. Its intention is to inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning (DEEWR 2010). The EYLF supports the view that critical thinking, reflection and inquiry are important practices to undertake with the aim to 'develop new insights into what we do and why we do it' (DEEWR 2010, p. 7).

Donald Schon (1995) was one of the first scholars to contribute to our understanding of the theory and practice of reflection. Reflective practice is essentially a way of improving practice. Critical reflection takes Schon's model a step further. This is notable as critical reflection involves exploring multiple perspectives, making clear the links between theory and practice, and making purposeful changes to practice to improve children's outcomes. A study by McMullen (2010, p. 10) suggested that this can help educators to question: 'long-held beliefs to shake up old, dusty assumptions about how things are supposed to be'. The EYLF affirms that when educators closely examine events and experiences from different perspectives and critically review their practices, curriculum quality, equity and children's learning improve (DEEWR 2010, p. 13).

As noted previously, participants were not really conversing or sharing dialogue about the history of Aboriginal Australia. The EYLF encourages educators to critically reflect on and

build ‘understanding and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and contemporary societies’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 25). The EYLF advocates that the first and foremost aspect in implementing the curriculum framework is to become aware and grow our knowledge and understanding of the ‘unique place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures hold in Australia’ (Goodwin 2012, p 14). Without critiquing and questioning the normalised perspectives and knowledge thereby arises a tendency to perpetuate a stance; a way of knowing, producing knowledge that benefits the status quo. Those few participants who did mention the importance of developing an understanding and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories were critiquing the past without reflecting and critically examining the discourses of the past to apply new conceptualisations to ways of knowing and practice. Supporting this stance, Haviland (2008, p. 45) argues that citing historical examples of white privilege and racism is a ‘safe way’ to model critical self-reflection. The research demonstrates that this in fact does little more than confirm dominant perspectives. For example, some of the participants mentioned reflection without the deep engagement of why it is important. Mary stated that cultural competence for her began with critical reflection on her own identity stating that:

Cultural Competence begins with critical reflection on ones’ own cultural identity. My reflections really opened my eyes to the impact my culture has had on me personally and my professional practice. To have cultural competence I recognise I need to have the ability to understand, respect and open the channels to develop effective communication with people across all cultures. This understanding of my own identity and the identity of others has influenced my approach and the decisions I make as a practitioner. (Mary)

Mary makes an illuminating point about the importance of undertaking reflection on her own identity and shared in the previous section (see section 6.3) how her whiteness impacted upon her professional practice. This has potential to disrupt normalised ways of thinking and practices. Kate on the other hand, signifies the lack of conversations and reflections and points more to activities that were undertaken for the sake of doing. Kate shared:

For me like I said particularly in the last 18 months it’s been an ever-greater growth because I haven’t really been having conversations with people about cultural competence in my previous work which is a bit scary. Because as a principal, even when I worked at (site name) ... we had Aboriginal staff on site and an Aboriginal committee. But we didn’t have discussions like this around cultural competence, it was much more activity based and driven without necessarily doing the reflection and thinking behind. Doesn’t mean it wasn’t useful or good and didn’t meet people’s needs but in terms of working with staff about their understanding I think there was still a bit of work to be done. (Kate)

Kate demonstrates that in her previous role, discussions around issues related to Aboriginal education were ad-hoc and meaningless in the context of challenging how systems work to privilege and normalise dominant discourses. On the other hand, June takes the concept of reflection further by considering not just her identity, but her histories and her life experiences along with new learnings. As discussed above in the previous section, Ruth emphasized her understanding of cultural competence in relation to other ways of knowing through engaging with the literature on ‘cultural intelligence’. Cultural intelligence is defined as the capability of an individual to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Ang, Van Dyne & Rockstuhl 2015, p. 3). Ruth shared her perspectives on cultural intelligence:

Within that cultural intelligence, Ang actually says that there are four capabilities and he talks about motivation, cognition, meta cognition and behaviour and he’s got probably interesting little definitions attached to what that looks like, so it becomes more intrinsic to the work that we do. Then it becomes more intrinsic to the work I do. (Ruth)

Ruth provides an example of using aspects of Ang, Van Dyne and Rockstuhl (2015) cultural intelligence framework in her practice:

I think about the diverse cultures I have here at the centre and besides Aboriginal communities, I think about how I change when I’m with the Sudanese community or when I’m in the Chinese community. So, can I adapt the cultural lenses I have for Aboriginal families to say Sudanese or say Chinese? Not necessarily, because the stories are different and whether the personality of me as an educator may be seen as static. However, I need to adapt my approach either from communities of culture and more importantly to individual families. One size does not fit all. (Ruth)

Ruth critically reflected upon her understanding of cultural competence and located her position within the cultural intelligence discourse. She claims to have also demonstrated behavioural and metacognitive strategies when working with ‘diverse cultures’. In saying this, one has to be aware that the discourse around diversity can also be interpreted as ‘diversity in a nice colour-blind way or in an antagonistic way’ (Castagno 2014, p. 2). Castagno (2014, p. 2) challenges educators to rethink the ways in which language is used particularly in ‘nice ways’, she stresses an important point that words such as ‘diversity’ may be used as a ‘nice cover for oppression and injustice’. I am not suggesting that this is the case with Ruth, but this research highlights the concern that it is often the case to normalise notions of diversity without challenging or explicitly ignoring how ‘race’ and racism impacts how we teach and interact with children and families. For example, Castagno (2014, p. 2) emphasises that ‘diversity’ discourse offers an entry point to critique and question notions of equity and social justice. Regardless of Ruth’s quest to broaden her

understanding, there is no indication in the excerpts above that some of the participants are involved in any critical reflection that challenge notions of equity and social justice.

Engaging in critical reflection is an ongoing process and supports educators to question what informs their beliefs and how this shape their practices. Joan and Mary shared their beliefs about reflective practice:

One of the things that supported a change in thinking and development of thinking for me was about saying ‘we just can’t keep on going and saying, ‘oh we must do something about that one day’. (Joan)

The opportunity to ... challenge thinking, share learning and explore possibilities was a very valuable experience. (Mary)

I contend that Joan makes an important point in that there is potential to grow and develop from exploring not just the unknown but also discovering what we know and questioning how we know. Joan emphasises that procrastinating does little to benefit learning and development. It is about challenging thinking and constructions. Rouse (2012, p. 9) affirms that educators who undertake critical reflection see change as a process of ongoing learning and development, and consider learning as a lifelong journey. Similarly, June also highlighted the importance of challenging and disrupting our beliefs and values. June stated:

I am very aware that individual ‘attitudes’ still contribute and play a major role in how cultural competence is approached with either a closed or open mind. The challenge is to continually try to address and change negative attitudes by responding to questions openly, honestly and to the best of your ability. (June)

June demonstrates the need to examine our ways of knowing to disrupt dominant narratives. Reflection, examining and questioning of dominant discourse shapes our development and provides an awareness of how discursive practices might shape our ways of knowing. This chapter has highlighted the importance of critically reflecting upon and examining the structures that contribute to privilege.

It has been demonstrated in this chapter that the themes are reflective of educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Furthermore, many of the educators are at different ‘levels’ of their understandings of cultural competence. Clearly some participants are beginning their journey of ‘knowing about’ cultural competence and others are able to challenge reductive notions of culture and the concept of ‘competence’.

| Framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of knowing about ‘cultural competence’ |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                              | Beginning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Emerging                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Evolving                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Ways of knowing                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing that knowledge about cultural competence is socially constructed</li> <li>• Building on partial understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures</li> <li>• Beginning to silently challenge ‘regimes of truth’.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to begin to challenge ongoing colonial effects</li> <li>• Knowing about the state of unconsciousness of privilege</li> <li>• Knowing how to disrupt deficit discourse.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing about and disrupting normalised narratives</li> <li>• Problematising assumptions about culture and competence</li> <li>• Challenging reductive notions that suggest one can ‘know’ and ‘be competent’ in culture</li> </ul> |

**Table 14: Framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of knowing about ‘cultural competence’**

The table is set to align with Karen Martin’s (2003) Aboriginal research framework – ways of being, knowing, and doing. Some of the research participants could be positioned as between emerging and evolving in their understandings of cultural competence. These ways of ‘knowing’ and ‘discovering’ have important implications for educators in terms of how they approach operationalising cultural competence. At the end of the next two discussion chapters is opportunity to add to this table as participants’ understandings and perspectives are further unveiled.

### **6.5 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter critically reflected on participants’ ways of knowing in relation to their understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence. Most participants described cultural competence as a way of knowing but failed to mention the deeper reflection on the systemic ways of being and doing, including that of privilege. Such privilege influences their thinking and perspectives. Instead of seeing their lack of understanding and knowledge as a means to reflect and learn there appeared to be a form of silent resistance amongst some of the participants. This resistance renounces the need for critical and analytical reflection followed by strategic action.

In the absence of a clear way of conceptualising cultural competence it becomes nothing more than a metaphor that perpetuates and embeds whiteness and resettles dominant practices. For this reason, it is important for educators to continually examine and

problematise assumptions around the meanings of influential concepts. Time to critically examine concepts in line with our values, biases, stereotypes is evidently significant and raises our social-consciousness to better inform our understandings and perspectives of issues that are relevant to the children, families and communities we work with.

Ways of knowing about cultural competence in this chapter was emphasised through the sharing of understandings and acknowledging that no one person or entity knows all. It was also about acknowledging that there are different types of knowledges at different levels of operation that is contextual and dependant on some form of relationship. Additionally, the analysis accentuated the importance of reconceptualising through critical reflection dominant narratives to offer new perspectives. To this end, the next chapter will be framed with the context of 'Ways of being: policy as paradox' and is understood as our ways of knowing informing our ways of being.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: Ways of being: policy as paradox**

### ***7.1 Introduction***

Chapter Six focussed on the research participants' ways of knowing in relation to their understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence. Through sharing understandings and perspectives meaning can be reconceptualised through critical reflection to develop new perspectives. The previous chapter also demonstrated that there are different types of knowledges at different levels of operation that are contextual and dependant on some form of relationship and way of knowing. As Sims (1999, p. 3) eloquently explains, 'there no longer needs to be a pretence that we are experts. It is appropriate to ask questions; to not know but be willing to find out'. In the absence of a clear way of conceptualising cultural competence it becomes nothing more than a metaphor that perpetuates dominant practices. For this reason, it is important for educators to continually examine and problematise assumptions around the meanings of powerful concepts.

This chapter expands on Karen Martin's (2008) conceptual framework of 'Ways of knowing, being and doing' focussing specifically on 'ways of being' and rests upon the codes generated from the data (see section 5.2). These codes include 'support', 'time constraints', 'systems thinking', and 'challenges'. The overarching theme of this chapter is on policy being a paradox that influences educators' ways of being culturally competent. As noted previously, cultural competence exists within a network that is reciprocal and contextual and evolves as contexts change. Ways of being culturally competent are reconstructed through sharing knowledge and consolidating what is known in relationship with other people. The issues covered in this chapter relate primarily to the constraints felt on part by the research participants in being culturally competent. First, I discuss the perspectives of educators and the systemic constraints they experience (section 7.2). Second, given this context, I consider how educators approaches towards cultural competence may be considered passive (7.3). Third, educators' perceived level of cultural competence is discussed (7.4).

### ***7.2 Systemic constraints***

There has been various inquiries, reviews and research into ways of engaging with and supporting Aboriginal children in education (Bourke, Rigby & Burden 2000; Mellor & Corrigan 2004). The scholarship around the issues that inhibit the successful engagement of Aboriginal children in education include discourse related to Aboriginal education such

as: Educators lack of awareness of culture (Perso 2012; Partington 2003); educators lack of time to engage with Aboriginal families and communities (Hunt 2013; Goodwin 2012); communication barriers (Grace & Bowes 2010; Hunt 2013); parent and communities lack of trust towards sites of education (Lewthwaite, Osborne, Lloyd, Llewellyn, Boon, Webber, Laffin, Kemp, Day, Wills & Harrison 2015; Sims 2011), ethnocentric attitudes (Campbell 2016; Perso 2012) and one-size-fits-all approaches (Sims, 2011; Trudgett & Grace, 2011). Much of this lack of success in engaging with Aboriginal children and communities can be related to perspectives and values evidenced in the Western educational system. Educators and their pedagogical practices are consistent factors when examining the engagement or lack of engagement of Aboriginal children in Australian schools. Ladwig and King (2003) argue that the main issue for change in education and development is the pedagogy of educators. Ladwig and King (2003, p. 3) affirm that it is educator's pedagogy that has the greatest influence on student improvement. For this reason, educators' perspectives on the constraints that inhibited their being culturally competent is discussed. To begin this discussion, I share the perspective of Aboriginal early childhood educator, Jenny, who raises the issue of respecting and acknowledging children's cultural backgrounds as core to being culturally competent:

In the past people try to box us in, [that] we have always sort of felt like the fringe dwellers, always being on the outer. But I think it's really important as part of this cultural competence is to recognise the children's culture, recognise and value our cultures as First Nation peoples. (Jenny)

Jenny makes an important point about the significance of recognising a child's culture. As framed by various writers (Burgess & Berwick 2009; Sims 2011; Gollan & Malin 2012), Aboriginal people have a strong connection with culture and therefore services that are responsive to the cultural needs of Aboriginal children contribute to improving learning outcomes. Although, Jenny alludes to cultural competence as a means to acknowledge children's culture, there is lack of substance as to how cultural competence is operationalised. As highlighted in Chapter Six and in the review of research on cultural competence, there are multiple perspectives and criticisms of the practice of cultural competence, particularly around its methodology and operationalisation (Lum 2011; Dean 2001). The previous chapter highlighted the participants unsettling understandings and perspectives of cultural competence which raises the question of who does it disadvantage or exclude? Any discourse that further disadvantages a group of people works in ways that is convincing and influential. Gill described this type of discourse as discourse that 'is organised to make itself persuasive' (Gill 1996, p. 143). Additionally, this type of discourse

is what Mac Naughton (2005, p. 43) refers to as ‘tactical use of knowledge’. Malson (1998, p. 29) expressively states: ‘Discourses regulate and discipline by constituting fields of knowledge, instituting truths, constituting subjectivities in particular ways, positioning people within discourses and subjecting them to normalizing judgments’. As noted previously, some of the research participants question the practicality of ‘cultural competence’ and more so some expressed their concerns that they were uncomfortable with the term all together. What is important is questioning how we know what we know and concede that cultural competence is complex, contextual and intensely personal and cannot be applied universally. Jenny further shared her concerns about system levels thinking, stating that:

There needs to be a culture of change that ... you know that saying, it’s not policies and procedures that makes changes it’s the personal commitments and beliefs of one person ... From a higher level, it’s all rhetoric, it’s not what they say it’s what they do or don’t do. (Jenny)

Here, Jenny is concerned about policy being implemented in practice. The EYLF asks educators to integrate cultural competence in all aspects of the early childhood program ‘in order to *make the difference* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and *close the gap* that exists in current educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners’ (DEEWR 2010, p, 26). There is a broad assumption that there is an entity or essence of cultural competence which is knowable and a ‘truth’ to be defined and described (Dahlberg and Moss 2007, p. 93). The focus of the discourse of cultural competence is treated as a given, as an ‘expert-defined specification’ while there is little focus on the constructions of cultural competence (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p. 94). This highlights that there is lack of understanding around cultural competence and what this means in practice. The interviews demonstrated that there needs to be a commitment that individuals question their own standpoints and position themselves in a way that works to increase their knowledge base around Aboriginal peoples and communities. This requires passion, humility and a willingness to engage and be aware of their own values, beliefs and practices – both as an educator and as a learner. The interviews with some participants illustrated that there is a resistance on part of many educators to undertake such a journey. However, this contrasts with research participant Laura who explained her concern around some of the structures that she believes constrains the work of educators in developing cultural competence:

There are so many structures that are not supportive of my work in cultural competence, because we work in an empiricist Western white system. The system that we’re in values measuring children against in a point in time and by doing this it

means that we are leading all children regardless of what their abilities and capacities are to that one point, we are measuring them against that one point and that we also have language around children having deficits and gaps, that teachers see their teachable moments in the corridor of that deficit between where we are taking children and where the child is at rather than working in the Zone of Proximal Development and zone of possibility. (Laura)

Laura provided a powerful narrative of the ways in which education institutions, curriculum and pedagogical practices reflect white privilege. This privilege is represented through a curriculum that values Western knowledge and ways of being and doing, while other ways are presented as electives, or optional. Many researchers argue that NAPLAN is an imperialist testing agenda that works to position Aboriginal children as inferior to other students resulting in policy documents that further position Aboriginal students in a discourse of deficit. Aboriginal Early Childhood educator Jenny also shared her thoughts on support by State Education Authorities and deficit approaches:

There is nothing binding, no commitment, no knowledge, no effort, no understanding, it's just stereotypes and bigotry... There is too much work within education using a deficit model, they look at us as if we are a deficit, you're coming with, there's something deficit about us. (Jenny)

Jenny's comment reflects the discussion in Chapter Two that highlights that deficit thinking and actions were prominent in the history and current agenda of Aboriginal education. The function of the deficit ideology could be taken to deflect attention away from the systemic conditions and socio-political context that exacerbates inequities (Gorski 2010, p. 6). Beresford (2003) explains a deficit perspective as one that:

has its foundation in a conservative world view that Aboriginal people lack the cognitive capacity or environmental stimulation to succeed at school. Although discredited for several decades among informed educationalists, the view persists among some conservative teachers who continue to believe that a lack of adequate preparation for schooling in the home, poor language and literacy skill, and problems of attendance, health and nutrition explain the failure of many Aboriginal children to thrive in school. (Beresford 2003, p 27)

While deficit discourse was discussed at length in Chapter Two, the key issue of significance here is that deficit discourse is formed through colonial history and often revealed in 'seemingly neutral and compassionate ways' (Castagno 2014, p. 35). This continues to reinforce deficit assumptions about Aboriginal students which distracts attention from the role of the school, systems, policies and pedagogy. Shields, Bishop and Mazawi (2005, p. x) succinctly describe a deficit view as 'pathologizing ... a mode of colonization used to govern, regulate, manage, marginalize, or minoritize, primarily through hegemonic structures'. Like Jenny and Laura, Paula also talks about systemic constraints

and normalised institutional practices inhibit her work towards developing cultural competence:

I do think that we have a headset and an education system that's based on language and it's based on us, it shouldn't be, but all too often it becomes 'I'm the holder of information and I'll give it to you' and the implications of that is that there is only one way of information or learning. (Paula)

In this narrative, Paula highlighted her perspective of a Eurocentric education system that functions through language to privilege dominant cultures and perpetuates the historical legacies and assumptions underlying Aboriginal education. Current discourse defines Aboriginal education success through normalising requirements related to attendance and academic performance based on assumptions of an equal shared educational experience while denying structural inequities. Innovative research and practice in pedagogy is required to challenge the ideologies and discourse that continue to privilege normalised narratives about Aboriginal education including culturally competent practices. Joan talks about individual constraints in that some individuals think that they don't know enough so therefore they will do nothing. Joan stated that:

Ok I'm no expert which is fine, but doing nothing is a poor way out, so the constraints I also think are probably similar to the ways other educators think. That you have to be an expert in cultural competence to be talking about cultural competence. (Joan)

This is concerning as the field of education does not require a growing body of experts whose job is to define cultural competence. The discourse of cultural competence offers confidence and reassurance by alluding to a measurable reality rather than being an idea that meaning can only be ascertained through critical reflection (Dahlberg and Moss 2007). Joan elaborated and shared the following account:

One of the things that supported a change in thinking and development of thinking for me was about saying 'we just can't keep on going and saying oh we must do something about that one day'. Possibly the same for other educators... I reckon it's about saying, 'let's make an attempt and if we fail it won't be because its deliberate it will be because we are learning along the way', so there is no right or wrong. Part of the learning has to incorporate high levels of respect for all people so that they are at the point where they'll say that's ok if they make a mistake. (Joan)

Joan brings into question issues of being respectful and open in learning encounters of different cultural perspectives. Being ethical and responding with respect is fundamental in response to acknowledging a diversity of cultural knowledge's. By way of an example, the EYLF points to cultural competence as being inclusive of the behavioural attributes, attitudes and policies which propose to lead to understanding of varying cultural positions and knowledge's (DEEWR 2010). There is a requirement for educators to explore

critically, challenge and disrupt aspects of Australian colonial history and curricula that is 'grounded in the worldviews, beliefs and norms of those who conceptualize and teach' (Ball 2004, p. 456). The EYLF asks educators to 'critically reflect on their own views and understandings of early childhood theory, research and practice for the 'degree of fit' with local understandings, experiences and expectations' (DEEWR 2010, p. 27). However, contradictory, the EYLF refers to cultural competence as being 'about assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build their capacity' (DEEWR 2010, p. 27). This discourse while 'seemingly neutral and compassionate' (Castagno 2014, p. 35) assumes that it is the student who must adapt and change. This continues to strengthen deficit thinking and assumptions about Aboriginal people. The deficit assumptions are reflected in people's ways of knowing and being. One of the participants, Sally reflected that: 'people are only constrained by their attitudes and beliefs'. These constraints also present in other ways. For instance, Joan explained her perspective about cultural competence being potentially viewed as an add-on practice. Joan reflected that:

Part of the constraints is about my thinking and some of my staff in the past; thinking with a short-term agenda about cultural competence that even if we started at the beginning of the year with a focus on cultural competence, we would have this idea in our heads that by halfway through or by the end of the year we would have 'done' cultural competence. (Joan)

Other research substantiates Joan's claims that thinking with a short-term agenda is not constructive to the core purpose of developing cultural competence (Perso 2012; SNAICC 2012). The EYLF advocates a process of undertaking a journey as 'critical to the development of cultural competence' (DEEWR 2010, p. 21). Joan also reflected that:

Cultural competence is actually a journey, a process, over a long period of time. And when we get to that point where we think 'ok I know it all' then we are probably at that point where actually we don't know it all, just the fact that we think like that tells me something. (Joan)

Joan previously admitted to following a way of thinking about cultural competence as something to be achieved within a timeframe. Through further reflection, Joan changed her thinking and observed that understanding cultural competence is a journey. Clearly, this research highlights that the education system fails to acknowledge that their ways of being places limitations on growing and developing understandings. Similarly, Ruth suggested that anything 'Aboriginal' within the education system was an add on. Ruth detailed that:

The education structure is not necessarily a supportive structure. There are some good people but again. I see Aboriginal education as an add on as opposed to embedded. So potentially it can constrain the work. I am lucky enough as I don't see it as a constraint; I do think there are systemic barriers that actually create institutional racism ... it can be very wearing. (Ruth)

Ruth's narrative about the view of Aboriginal education as a constraint supports the scholarship around dominant discursive regimes that work through language to describe certain concepts and ways of being. These concepts then become a framework of sorts that we use to shape our understandings and actions (Dahlberg & Moss 2007). They also constitute boundaries and systemic barriers that create practices that privilege some and perpetuate embedded racism for others. Paula shared her thinking around boundaries:

As I got older I think I stopped trying to put boundaries around it and just learned to listen. I don't think we are very good at that, I think a lot of people just want to package ... So, we look at things and put our headset on them and it's not right. (Paula)

Paula takes a stance that we govern ourselves through embodying thoughts and actions as an expression of power that work to shape practice and relationships. Sometimes this does not benefit the people we are supposed to be working with and excludes alternative ways of understanding and interpreting. Paula appears to acknowledge this, but later likens some of the constraints to families stating that:

I think the other things that I really struggle with is with the mobility of a lot of families, so they're there and it takes a while for the child to settle down and settle into the situation, we are going really well, then there is another funeral and they are gone again and or mum moves in and you don't get along with uncle joe, and there is an awful lot of people on the outside it looks like irresponsible, up and going and it isn't, we need again to be able to connect with people and have that thread so that when that family comes back they have that relationship there. (Paula)

The most routine act of whiteness performed by non-Aboriginal educators occurs through a lack of understanding and making value-laden judgements. Paula states that she struggles with the transience of some families. She also acknowledges that there should be a form of participatory relationship between educators and families for transience issues but there is no challenge to be self-reflective about why one would label behaviours and families practices as 'irresponsible'. This is a judgement, a value made that fits within a white norm. This type of discourse acts as an oppressive structure that ensures white privilege. This silences a conversation on part of the educator about taking responsibility for confronting the conditions that contribute to some Aboriginal families' transience. Paula is selective in highlighting transience issues fortified by a notion of 'tolerance'. While well intended, Paula provided an example of how her ideas are part of an 'accepted' construction of Aboriginal ways of being which detracts from engagement with deeper issues of privilege and how it manifests itself in education.

The ideology of good intentions emerges from the research on whiteness (See Gillborn 2008; Castagno 2014). Constructions of Aboriginal peoples as inferior and educators as

superior represent the construction of whiteness as inherently better. With frustration comes the ideology of blaming the ‘other’ rather than seeking to learn about or critique one’s own beliefs and practices. Some of the research participants struggled to make sense of some of these issues. By way of an example, Aboriginal early childhood educator, June shared that:

I think sometimes that the ability to be culturally competent within an educational setting is often left up to the Aboriginal people ... However, there have also been some non-Aboriginal educators who see this as an exciting opportunity to build connections and grow their knowledge and understanding about Aboriginal people ... there are [is] specific information about our history that is not negotiable and it’s important that they participate and engage in respectful conversations. (June)

June does not mention how this is done, and merely mentions conversations. Some researchers point to conversations with Aboriginal families and communities to develop new knowledge and understandings that disrupts Eurocentric pedagogies and practices (Hunt 2013; Perso 2012). However, the findings in this research raise the question of whether this is ever enough? Enacting a pedagogy of listening and appreciation of listening to Aboriginal families can contribute to critical reflective thinking resulting in new learning. Additionally, developing new learning often occurs within professional learning opportunities. This requires exercising caution, critiquing the purpose, delivery format and time factors of any cultural competence professional learning. By way of an example, Joan insisted that:

Cultural competence is not the sort of thing I’ve learnt that you can do a workshop on and then educators go off and voila – they’re culturally competent! (Joan)

Professional learning is a collective responsibility of all educators but is also located as a tool of the dominant culture. Most professional learning is grounded in whiteness that remains invisible to non-Aboriginal educators. The next section elaborates more on professional learning to developing cultural competence and the types of resistance that participants express in respect to this.

### ***7.3 Passive approaches and being ‘nice’***

Power relations are normalised through discourse that may appear passive but is aggressive and rarely interrogated. By way of an example, professional learning opportunities aim to provide opportunity to enhance ones understanding about a certain topic. There is an expectation that there would be some form of transformational change in understanding and in practice. The research participants provided a variety of views on the relevance and

usefulness of professional learning opportunities to developing cultural competence. For example, Ruth asked the question:

I can attend all types of manner of professional development and tick off that I have participated but does that necessarily mean I am culturally competent? (Ruth)

Ruth raised a pertinent question here on the usefulness of such professional development and if they create some form of transformation that impacts pedagogy. June shared her perspective that cultural competence is a two-way learning and that all educators undertake some form of professional learning:

being culturally competent in one context is not the same in another context. I believe that it is a two-way learning approach and should not be seen as an imposition. All educators should undertake some form of professional learning in order that they expand upon their knowledge. (June)

Both June and Ruth used different terminology in respect to professional learning and have different views on the effectiveness of professional learning. Knapp (2003, p.112) defines professional development as ‘the full range of activities, formal and informal, that engage teachers ... in new learning about their professional practice’. While professional learning refers to ‘changes in the thinking, knowledge, skills and approaches to instruction that form practicing teachers’... repertoire’ (Knapp 2003, pp. 112–113). Knapp (2003) highlights the subtle differences between professional learning and professional development. The stance taken in this research is that both ‘professional development’ and ‘professional learning’ are essential and relevant in terms of improving professional practice that works towards positively influencing student learning and which influences educators through critical reflection. Mary previously made an informative point about the importance of undertaking reflection on her own identity and shared how her whiteness impacted upon her professional practice (see section 6.2). This type of engagement and critical reflection has potential to disrupt normalised ways of thinking and practices. Mary demonstrates in the following extensive narrative how attending some professional learning challenged and changed her thinking to develop new understandings:

I was also able to further my personal journey towards growing cultural competence when I became involved in a professional Learning journey with other colleagues. This was a great opportunity for me to learn more both professionally and personally. As a result of attending this professional learning, I have come to realise that growing cultural competence is not only about building respectful relationships with Aboriginal children, families and community. It is also about understanding more about ‘Aboriginal ways of being’, such as the depth of their connections to the land and connections with each other. It is quite elaborate learning about family connections and I still don’t quite know how the families interrelate but certainly am looking forward to learning more. As a leader, I am now more focussed on

questioning how certain values, beliefs and life experiences have influenced my practice. (Mary)

For Mary, attendance at a professional learning session validated a shift in her understandings of cultural competence as being centred on relationships but also inclusive of understanding ‘ways of being’. Ways of being in this sense is informed by lived experiences and individual values and beliefs. The research participants who undertook the Cultural Competence Q sort reveal similar perspective’s relative to professional learning. Participants were asked to rank order a set of statements into a distribution grid ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Thus, participants had to decide rankings per their personal opinions about given statements. For example, statement 26; *‘In the last year I have attended at least one professional learning session that has enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence’*. For this statement, eight participants ranked the statement as agree, eight ranked the statement as disagree and two participants ranked the statement as neutral, neither agree or disagree. Similarly, statement 22; *‘I have undertaken cultural awareness training and am happy with my current knowledge of Aboriginal cultures’*, two participants ranked the statement as agree, 13 ranked the statement as disagree and three participants ranked the statement as neutral. Participants were also invited to make further comment and participant 14 in the Q Data reflected that:

Most training that I have undertaken has been ad hoc and somewhat haphazard. I would appreciate a systematic approach so that my understanding could grow.

Similarly, participant 15 in the Q Data stated that:

If only there was more support from leaders and the system around how we begin this journey towards growing cultural competence.

In the subsequent interviews, Joan also expressed her view on the lack of support through the Education Department, stating that:

I think it’s really good that EYLF has a focus on it [cultural competence] as one of the principles and practices in the EYLF ... I don’t think the department is doing much to really support that... we don’t discuss cultural competence ... and then broaden or share this with educators in the field. (Joan)

While it is not the intention of this research to measure the impact of such professional learning and development opportunities, participants did feel that more support was needed in developing a coordinated systemic approach to the delivery of professional learning. Supporting this stance, Ma Rhea, Anderson and Atkinson (2012, p. 7) also affirm that at a national level there is a lack of systemic level planning for teacher professional

development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education along with scant evaluation of formal professional development. Additionally, Ma Rhea, Anderson and Atkinson (2012, p. 8) point to another limitation included formal teacher professional development that was ‘patchy, ad hoc and lacking in cohesiveness’. Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin and Knoche (2009) point to the necessity of having a highly competent workforce for the early childhood field to contribute to optimal child learning and development. Professional development opportunities can provide the path to achieving this goal. Along with professional development opportunities, early childhood educators are advised to utilise existing networks, service and resources including the local community to enhance the knowledge and skills of educators (Stoll, Harris & Handscomb 2012). These types of professional learning communities have capacity to help educators develop and integrate new learning into their pedagogy (Harris & Jones 2011; Stoll, Harris & Handscomb 2012). Mac Naughton (2005) equally confirms the value of professional learning communities specifically when there is shared understanding between all participants of the purpose of the learning. As desirable as this sounds, some of the research participants described their difficulties at the lack of networks and community support available. By way of an example, Mary shared that:

It is difficult to access relevant quality resources, materials and information and local knowledge, its actually very sad that it is so difficult to access local knowledge. We have had many difficulties trying to get Aboriginal members from the local community to come into our centre and share their knowledge. (Mary)

Mary shared the difficulties associated with connecting to local sources. The EYLF suggests educators consider the extent to which they ‘know and value the culturally specific knowledge about childhood, children and learning that is embedded within the community in which they are working’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 27). This requires educators to take time and opportunities to consult with Elders, family and community members ‘to share culturally valued ways’ in early childhood programs (DEEWR 2010, p. 28). Participants who undertook the Cultural Competence Q sort were provided with the following statement, *‘I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures service by their sites’*. Nine participants ranked this statement along the agree continuum. Four ranked along the disagree continuum and five participants were neutral in their response. Only half of the participants were supportive of utilising their local community to support the cultural needs of Aboriginal children. The remainder of the participants were passive in their

neutral stance where their silence works to legitimize whiteness (Castagno 2008). Participant 14 stands strong in his/her assertion that:

I am not felled by fear: as an educator, it is my responsibility to begin the journey with children and families and not wait until I believe that I have all of the information needed.

The EYLF maintains that ‘culturally competent educators will continue to reflect on practice through professional learning and side by side discussion with communities and families’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 28). It is important for educators to learn alongside Aboriginal communities and families instead of relying solely on dominant perspectives. One of the constraints identified in the literature is centred around lack of support, in that, education sites are left with the task of engaging with Aboriginal families and communities without appropriate support (Krakouer 2015, p. 5). This was discussed in an earlier section (see section 7.2). One of the participants Kate, stated that the absence of Aboriginal children and families from services is a constraint, noting that:

I guess in working in environments where there are no Aboriginal families I think that’s always a constraint because you haven’t necessarily got people that you can work alongside, so then it’s about thinking well what do I need to do to incorporate inclusivity in the curriculum. (Kate)

It can be assumed that Aboriginal families and communities are viewed as the ‘problem’ when absent from early childhood services. This ideology and practice is couched within a framework of whiteness where the interests of the dominant group are protected (Castagno 2014, p. 76). Rose (2012, p. 71) uses the term ‘racism by cotton wool’ to symbolise the Australian education systems openly suppressing and devaluing of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. Some educators tend to blame other aspects for instance the lack of system support, lack of time and lack of Aboriginal families and communities interest in engaging with education sites.

The discourse of blame will no doubt be scrutinized. Nevertheless, when educators fail to engage with and build on existing Aboriginal community strengths and focus on deficits, the status quo is maintained in terms of curriculum and pedagogical choices (Hunt 2013). In the above example, Kate demonstrated how the effects of colonisation continue to operate through discourse and practice, even if meant with good intentions. In this example, restrictive boundaries are set. The literature points to the role that positive relationships play between families and educators to enhance children’s learning outcomes. It is widely acknowledged that ‘quality personal relationships’ are important in school-community relationships (Milgate 2016). Developing relationships with Aboriginal

families and communities is based on trust and respect and takes time. The concept of time was identified by some of the participants as a constraint in developing their cultural competence. Paula discussed aspects of time, respect and building relationships with families and communities:

I also think that the thing we struggle about, and I certainly struggled about as a young teacher is so much really valuable work is done just by chatting, and we don't have time to do that, and so it looks like that your just leaning against the fence having a yarn about nothing but it's about building relationships because I'm not going to trust you with my children and more importantly with the things that are really important to me if I don't know you , so how do we build that factor in, I think that we don't have an education system that respects that fact. (Paula)

Paula described how she valued yarning and listening to community stories without forcing upon communities a predetermined position. Paula described the fact that building relationships with Aboriginal families and communities and taking the time to do so is very important. Some of the other research participants also referred to 'time' as a constraint. By way of an example, Laura shared that:

The system asks us to be tasky and fast thinkers, where in fact cultural competence requires deep slow thinking, and honouring time to yarn about it, we do not honour that, we say we do but then we give it 5 minutes. (Laura)

Time poses a challenge for some but it seems to be located within pre-established objectives as mentioned by Laura. Time is also an essential factor for Joan, who stated that:

The fact that we place time restrictions on it, which is about a lack of understanding, we place time restrictions on our work and our understandings, when it's actually a long-term approach and process. (Joan)

Joan associated the concept of time to lack of understanding. Similarly, Paula too believes that time is an important factor in learning:

I know that I need to listen and to ask questions and more importantly to respect that it takes time to get answers. (Paula)

Ruth also referred to time in developing cultural competence, that it takes time and cannot be limited to professional development opportunities:

I am wondering whether some people are passive in their approach to cultural competency-as if they may pick it up by osmosis. Time has to be inclusive of understanding cultural competency. (Ruth)

The participants have revealed that lack of time potentially sets boundaries on what educators think, question and practice. Everything within these boundaries therefore becomes normalised and taken for granted. Everything outside is disregarded and

dismissed (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p. xiv). This places restriction on developing relationships and forming partnerships.

Several constraints that impinge on educators developing cultural competence have been identified. Some of these constraints include systemic limitations related to education department resourcing including professional learning, and other organisational features including lack of time and lack of Aboriginal families and communities perceived lack of interest in engaging with education sites. Educators in this sense are shaped towards a particular norm, a standard that works to serve the needs of the status quo. There appears to be a level of uncertainty on part of some of the participants in both the Cultural Competence Q sorts and semi-structured interviews. Such a concomitant absent sense of responsibility among educators to challenge these constraints serve to embed whiteness.

Research identifies that when educators engage with their local Aboriginal communities, authentic partnerships have an opportunity to develop. Taking time to yarn and have a conversation with families is of upmost importance. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR 2009b, p. 2) affirm that ‘You can’t have a partnership without a relationship, and you can’t have a relationship without a conversation. You’ve got to have the conversation’. Therefore, time is of the essence. Educators can’t afford to be passive in their approaches in challenging some of the constraints. Ruth shared her perspective, stating that:

Put me in a different context and I am beginning, so you don’t ever reach a level of proficiency ... it again should be seen in context of my community ... I recognise that I have developed knowledge but even I am still learning even when I continue to connect with community, I’m still learning. (Ruth)

Ruth acknowledged that she is still learning and in a different context she would potentially be beginning her learning. Ruth also mentioned reaching a certain level of proficiency. The next section focuses on participant views on their perceived level of cultural competence.

#### ***7.4 Self-evaluating cultural competence***

Participants were asked to indicate their perceived level of cultural competence. This was an important aspect of the research in that self-reporting cultural competence portrays understanding of the theory in practice. This section highlights the research participants views on quantifying cultural competence in terms of experiences, knowledge and practice and relates to the participants’ perspectives linked to constraints impinging on their developing what they perceive to be cultural competence. Joan shared her perspective and self-assessed her perceived level of cultural competence:

One of the things I said at the beginning was about how my level is better than before and then I wonder about whether I have become more competent, because that statement shows I'm not very culturally competent - I do have a different understanding - my first thought was about 'it's better than what it was before' so it was about me putting some judgement in there; some value that 'ok now I'm better than I used to be'. I do still think that at this point of time it's not part of my psyche or subconscious that I still think of cultural competence as being about other cultures... So, my understanding when I reflect on it is - that it's different to what it used to be, but not saying better. Using the word better sort of says 'oh I'm great now' and I need to remember that's its different because there is still learning necessary for me. (Joan)

Joan indicated that self-reporting is a highly subjective process where we situate value and worth. What stands out in Joan's narrative is that she acknowledged in the conclusion of her quote that cultural competence is a learning journey. The EYLF (DEEWR 2010) also highlights that cultural competence is about undertaking a journey. This was also evident in Laura's narrative about her perceived level of cultural competence. Laura shared that:

I can say that in the current space and in the current time which I am at, I am open to the possibilities that I have got a long way to go, but I'm also aware that I am as much as I can be open to the cultures of others. I do feel that I learn from other cultures, open to others' cultures, value other cultures, passionately value other cultures for what they bring, so therefore I feel that a certain level of resistance, maybe unconscious resistance, has gone in me which enables me to see more clearly where I might not be being as open as I should be to call myself culturally competent therefore being aware of some of the blockers and of possible blockers ... I believe I am on that pathway towards cultural competence, I shouldn't even say towards, but in that space of possibility of cultural competence, which I have every intention of remaining on or in. (Laura)

Collectively, Joan and Laura provide important insights into some of the possible opportunities for learning about privilege and whiteness. Laura also mentions an 'unconscious resistance' to learning. This is apparent in the talk of 'other' cultures. This discourse maintains privilege by 'perpetuating and legitimating the status quo while simultaneously maintaining a veneer of neutrality, equality and compassion' (Castagno 2014, p .5). I would argue that the term cultural competence could be added to the list of words as an ideological construct that serves to justify dominance of one group over other groups. What is required is a shift, focussing less on identities and more on institutions and ideologies. There would appear to be a common thread amongst the participants, that is they are aware the prevalence of deficit ideologies and discourses, particularly with the use of 'others' as an oppressive term, but don't act to confront it. Castagno refers to these types of practices as 'engaging niceness in powerful ways' (Castagno 2014, p. 35). Explanations centre more on undertaking a journey. This is fine for educators to talk about their good intentions in undertaking a journey but recognising deficit ideologies is important to begin

to approach equity. Mary too talks about her journey of developing cultural competence. Mary expressed that:

I find it hard to quantify my level of Cultural Competence. My journey so far has opened my eyes and deepened my commitment to learning, respecting, recognising, and challenging myself and others and to providing a more collaborative, inclusive learning program. (Mary)

Mary politely referred to learning and challenging herself but did not provide specific ways of doing this. The discourse sounds like good intentions but lacks finer details of challenging the ways in which privilege is maintained and perpetuated. Therefore, it is little more than what Aboriginal early childhood educator Jenny refers to as rhetoric (see section 7.2). If we now turn to Ruth, she suggested the important role and value she places on her community in assessing her cultural competence. Ruth took the following stance:

If I had worked 3 years in a community and then decided to walk away could I claim to be culturally competent based on the knowledge I had developed and if I used then the baseline of Elders or cultural leaders in the community, I'm sure they would say no. So, who then is judging and deeming that I am culturally competent? (Ruth)

Ruth's narrative highlights the significant role she places on Aboriginal Elders in assessing one's cultural competence. Aboriginal elders are generally respected for the value of their cultural knowledge, their leadership skills and are called upon to make decision on behalf of the community (McIntyre 2001). Recognising the role of Elders is critical in the relationship-building process and vital for education services. Ruth demonstrates in her narrative above that she values the wisdom and guidance of the Elders in her Aboriginal community. It is always a good idea to consult with Aboriginal Elders, develop relationships and conceptual capacity to undertake collaborative work. Aboriginal early childhood educator, Sally shares a story about collaboratively working with a non-Aboriginal teacher. Sally shared her story noting that:

I did have 1 non-Aboriginal educator who did not have any understanding or awareness of how to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children ... It has been a long process to ensure that she has some cultural competence and understanding. I don't believe she is culturally competent yet but there has been an improvement in her understanding of Aboriginal ways of doing, family structures and relationships and practices. (Sally)

In the narrative above, Sally believed that as an Aboriginal person she has a responsibility to collaboratively work with the non-Aboriginal educator to 'ensure that she has some cultural competence'. Sally has an important role to share with her non-Aboriginal colleague's knowledge of the local community, kinships structures, and ways of being within her community. Sally is providing a counter-story and creating a space to share

important views on Aboriginal family functioning. This may provide for non-Aboriginal colleague's different possibilities in practice including the understanding of cultural norms and expectations. Sally does need to be mindful that she does not create a binary of us and them. It is important to recognise that Aboriginal colleagues can be mentors but can also be learners. A note of caution is due here: Aboriginal culture is represented by many language groups therefore Aboriginal people may claim to be knowledgeable in their own language group but cannot claim to know all about another. Sally acknowledges this later in her interview as she affirms that:

I believe I still have lots to learn especially when it comes to other language groups.

It is critical that all early childhood educators, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal develop the skills and conceptual capacity to undertake collaborative work to broaden understandings related to privilege. For non-Aboriginal workers, the challenge is to confront racism. This process can be both personally draining because it often requires understanding that some practices may be perpetuating the problems. Non-Aboriginal early childhood educator Kate shared that:

It's growing, for me it's been much more of a journey in the last 18 months, because more specifically I have had time to talk to people, to work with people which its part of the work that I do whereas it wasn't necessarily a prime focus before. (Kate)

Let us now turn to the Cultural Competence Q sort data. Participants were asked to rate the following statement, *'I am confident that I have reached a high level of cultural competence'* as to whether they agreed or disagreed with it. Four participants agreed, 11 disagreed, and three were neutral. This is an interesting result in that four participants agreed that they have 'reached a high level of cultural competence'. The single most striking observation of the overall data in this section, is that participants didn't refer to cultural competence as a developmental process as highlighted in the literature. By way of an example, Cross et al. (1989) advocates for cultural competence as the fifth component in a developmental process with cultural proficiency as the highest level of development. Pre-competence is the first stage along the continuum which is characterised by 'acceptance and respect for differences' (Cross et al. 1989, p. 32). At the other end of the spectrum is cultural proficiency where culture is held in 'high esteem' (Morris 2010, p. 32).

Some writers such as Kumas-Tan, Beagan, Loppie, MacLeod, and Frank (2007, p. 548) state that there are some 'highly problematic assumptions about what constitutes cultural competence'. Dean (2001, p. 624) maintains that a model in which an awareness of one's lack of competence is the goal rather than the establishment of competence is preferable.

Instead of ‘competence’ one thinks of gaining understanding as it is nearly impossible to ‘become competent at the culture of another’ (Dean 2001, p. 624). Ruth expresses her discontent with the word competence and likens it to a checklist. Ruth questioned whether the term competence alludes to:

that industrial of outcomes of competencies? So, does it perpetuate that industrial view of education i.e. a production line where success is measured in terms of outcomes? How compatible is that with the history of education or Aboriginal peoples? (Ruth)

Ruth highlighted that the concept of cultural competence is primarily a competency-driven discourse. Morris (2010, p. 319) problematises the term competence as ‘competence imparts the perception that culturally competence/sensitive/responsive practice is indeed attainable if appropriate steps are followed, requisite knowledge is acquired, and the boxes are ticked’. Within the Cultural Competence Q data, participant 17 also maintained that:

One can’t claim to be culturally competent; it’s not a skills checklist to tick off.  
(Participant 17 – Q sort)

Different theories exist in the literature concerning cultural competence. Cultural competence can be viewed as a list of dos and don’ts, a checklist of culturally appropriate practices that need to be mastered. The problem with this approach is that it does little more than perpetuate stereotypes and essentialises culture. White (2007, p. 230) also affirms that, ‘the assumption that the complexity of practice ... can be adequately conceptualised and measured by discrete ‘outputs’ like knowledge, skills, and attitudes can be highly problematic’. Furthermore, Kumagai and Lyson (2009) maintain that cultural competence does not address the structural origins of inequity and issues related to power and privilege that contributes to power inequities. Overall, the participants did not mention a continuum to developing cultural competence but instead self-reported their ‘level’ of cultural competence as ‘good, ‘it’s growing’ and ‘a long way to go’. It has been highlighted in this analysis a prominent view and acceptance of the ‘powerful potential of not knowing’ (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p. 170). Dean (2001, p. 624) also advocates for the position of not knowing about cultural competence and states that ‘there is no thought of competence - instead one thinks of gaining understanding (always partial) of a phenomenon that is evolving and changing’. In light of this, and using table 15 as a framework, some of the research participants could very well position themselves as beginning, emerging or evolving in their understandings of ways of being culturally competent.

| Framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of being ‘culturally competent’ |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                       | Beginning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Emerging                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evolving                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Ways of being                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unconsciously resisting dominant discourse</li> <li>• Engaging with good intentions and niceness</li> <li>• Being critically reflective by safely citing historical examples of white privilege.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decolonising selves and practices</li> <li>• Examining own position in society and developing a critical capacity to interrogate how privilege works</li> <li>• Being mindful of the great diversity of meaning about cultural competence.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disrupting normalized practices</li> <li>• Being attentive to privilege counter-stories of cultural competence</li> <li>• Problematising cultural competence as a competency.</li> </ul> |

**Table 15: Framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of being ‘culturally competent’**

These ways of ‘being’ culturally competent have important implications for educator’s in terms of how they approach operationalising cultural competence. At the end of the next discussion chapter participants’ understandings and perspectives of ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing cultural competence are converged in a complete framework of positioning as demonstrated in table 15 and previously in table 14 (see section 6.4).

### **7.5 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has demonstrated that conceptualising cultural competence in education is not only complex but also exists within a network of relationships between educators, children, families and communities. Furthermore, ways of being culturally competent change as contexts change (Martin 2003, p. 210). It was revealed by participants that ways of knowing and being culturally competent requires that educators reconstruct understandings through sharing knowledge and consolidating what is known through reciprocity and engagement with others.

Findings in this chapter highlighted participants: cognitive dissonance with institution directives; constrained by lack of time; and felt there was an overall lack of support from the education departments and community networks. While it was acknowledged the importance of developing respectful relationships with Aboriginal communities some educators pinpoint constraints to achieving this. Time was a significant factor. Participants

also acknowledged the systemic constraints and normalised institutional practices that inhibit their efforts towards developing cultural competence including limited opportunities for educators to critically explore facets of Australian history. The participants also provided a variety of perspectives on the relevance and usefulness of professional learning opportunities to developing cultural competence. Overall, participants felt that more support is needed in developing a coordinated systemic approach to the delivery of professional learning in this area. This would require a concerted effort to contextualise cultural competence professional learning by engaging with the knowledge of local Aboriginal communities and ensuring their voices and perspectives are primary in informing the content of professional learning.

The interview data affirms that culture is difficult to define and the notion of cultural competence is difficult to measure. Therefore, an awareness of one's lack of competence is the goal rather than the goal of reaching a point of competence as it is impossible to be competent in the culture of another (Dean 2001). To this end, the next chapter will be framed with the context of 'Ways of doing: being open to possibilities'.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: Ways of doing: being open to possibilities**

### ***8.1 Introduction***

There is some evidence that a lack of understanding about the concept of cultural competence can perpetuate deficit discourse (see section 2.2). This lack of understanding and an ideology of good intentions could be interpreted as a superficial aspect of cultural competence that is located within a panacea of deficit (Rose 2009). Chapter Six and Chapter Seven highlighted that participants' ways of knowing about and ways of being culturally competent requires educators to reconstruct and reconceptualise their understandings. The issues covered in the previous chapter focussed primarily on some of the constraints expressed by the educators in being culturally competent. Based on the analysis of the research findings what was significant was an awareness of one's lack of competence is the goal rather than the goal of reaching a point of competence.

This chapter focuses on the data analysis that highlights the third theme of 'ways of doing: being open to possibilities'. The participants shared in their narratives a journey of knowing about cultural competence to ways of being and ways of 'doing' cultural competence. This chapter has a future orientated approach that shares the narratives of participants continuing the journey of being open to possibilities of exploring, critiquing and questioning the concept of cultural competence. Firstly, the participants' perspectives on undertaking a learning journey is discussed (section 8.2) followed by the second part of the analysis that emphasises participants' understandings of cultural competence as ethical encounters (8.3). The final section (8.4) highlights the participants' stance towards cultural competence as an ethic of resistance. Let us now turn to educators' perspectives about 'ways of doing: being open to possibilities' of cultural competence.

### ***8.2 A learning journey***

Previous chapters have highlighted participants' conceptualisations of 'cultural competence' that is located within a complexity of discourses. Participants understandings of cultural competence are complex and subjective. A commonality between most participants' perspectives was of undertaking a learning journey. There is already a significant body of literature that foregrounds cultural competence as a learning journey (Campinha-Bacote 2002; Lum 2011; Sims 2011). This is also evident in the EYLF where cultural competence is defined as:

A learning journey which is underpinned by respectful relationships between the children, families and educators, organisations and communities, which continually evolve. There is not a 'one size fits all' approach as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse. (DEEWR 2010, p. 25)

This statement draws our attention to the importance of engaging with and building relationships with Aboriginal children, families and communities. A review of the research indicates that educators' relationships with Aboriginal families and communities is most important to engage Aboriginal students in their learning (Burgess & Cavanagh 2012; Harrison & Greenfield 2011; Milgate 2016). This is significant, but equally important is educators recognising their own beliefs, assumptions and values as variables that impact on relationships and interactions with Aboriginal students, families, and communities. Marshall and Oliva (2006, p. 6) affirm that within the Aboriginal education landscape:

Inequitable outcomes are not merely the result of deficiencies in the students, nor of the communities from which they come ... inequitable outcomes often result from systemic organizational practices and policies'.

Inequitable outcomes are influenced by educators' beliefs and values. In saying this, if we complicate our ways of knowing, being and doing to move beyond a normalized way of responding to and being open to many possibilities we shift from understanding practice to complexifying practices (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2015, p. 21). This is also evident in the research that highlights how critical reflection is an important part of ongoing professional learning and development (see section 6.4). Critical reflection moves us to question our beliefs, assumptions and understandings. Based on the analysis of the research findings what was significant was participants being uncomfortable to engage with difficult concepts. Mac Naughton (2005, p. 10) affirms that critical reflection is part of an ongoing effort to disrupt 'oppressive and inequitable power relations'. Paula, an experienced teacher reflected on her understandings of working with families stating that:

I think that's where I start with my cultural competence you know this is what we know and this is what we share and let's find out some more ... I have learnt more and more not to make assumptions about what families do know and want but to invite them ... to be a part of a journey together. (Paula)

Paula in speaking of learning with families is congruent with aspects of cultural humility. Cultural humility includes a facet of aspiring to develop partnerships with people and groups to enact change for the benefit of all (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia 1998). Paula is also pointing to the importance of self-evaluation. Occasionally self-evaluation leads to deliberate reflections, for example Ruth shared the following narrative after reflection:

Sometimes I think I look at things that are presented to people around checklists, and it might be a good starting point as a reference point because if you've only got small numbers of children in your site and no Aboriginal staff. (Ruth)

Ruth previously questioned the concept of cultural competence as being primarily a competency-driven discourse (see section 6.4). In the narrative above, Ruth mentions the use of checklists as a starting point. This is problematic as this does little more than perpetuate stereotypes and essentialises culture. Checklists tend to portray so called fixed characteristics of a diverse culture. Hollinsworth (2016, p. 40) affirms that 'strategic essentialism assumes cultural solidarity among a homogenous people'. Participant 17 in the Cultural Competence Q sort data maintained:

One can't ever claim to be culturally competent; it's not a skills checklist to tick off.  
(Q sort participant 17)

As affirmed by White (2007, p. 230) cultural competence cannot be measured by discrete 'outputs'. Recognised by some of the participants as problematic, checklists are not deemed appropriate. What is required is challenging the purpose of such checklists and troubling essentialised constructions of culture within such checklists. Checklists not only perpetuate stereotypes but portray 'binaries that "other" Aboriginal people in relation to the dominant society' (Hollinsworth 2016, p. 44). Essentialising cultures potentially encourages non-Aboriginal peoples to ignore the great diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (Hollinsworth 2016, p. 44). In relation to cultural competence, Carey (2015) states that:

Cultural competence is dependent on a discrete, unified and essentialised notion of Indigeneity that is rendered knowable in contradistinction to its opposite: non-Indigeneity. As such, it reinscribes the original, binaried relationship between Indigeneity and non-Indigeneity, upon which colonialist power relations are based.  
(Carey 2015, p. 838)

Carey (2015) points to the need for individuals to complexify the term and recognise the persuasive nature of the cultural competence paradigm in essentialising cultures. Some of the research participants portray a need for individuals to continually check in and challenge assumptions to reframe the role of the educator from one of expert to one of learner. It is also about seeking new potentials and questioning 'what haven't I considered' and 'who else should I be talking too?'. This is the point of undertaking a journey, of continually seeking to undertake continuous self-reflection on one's own assumptions and practices, and being comfortable in a space of 'not knowing' (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia 1998). Engaging in such self-reflection is an ongoing process and supports educators to question what informs their beliefs and how this shape their practices. Questioning is

crucial to self-reflection as affirmed by Paulo Freire (1998) who articulates a frame for the self-reflective educator-researcher:

I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. (Freire 1998, p. 35)

Freire (1998) conveys the process of critical self-reflection through questioning and interrogating to educate to contribute to one's growth. This was evident in Chapter Seven where it was suggested that the lack of success in engaging with Aboriginal children and communities can be related to dominant perspectives and values as evidenced in the Western educational system. It was acknowledged that there needs to be a commitment that individuals question their own standpoint and position themselves in a way that works to increase their knowledge base around Aboriginal peoples and communities. Joan referred to a type of learning she participated in previously:

The culture competence learning for me is very much people based, previously I used to think you could just get it from books or the internet ... but cultural competence has now for me become about making meaning with other people. (Joan)

Joan affirmed that this requires interacting with peoples, sharing dialogue and co-constructing meaning collaboratively. This necessitates a willingness to engage with families and communities and to be aware of their own values and beliefs and how this influences their practices. Most participants in the interviews agreed that working with families was beneficial, not just for the children but also for the educators who were committed to collaborative learning. In contrast, the participants who undertook the Cultural Competence Q sort differed significantly in their views towards working with their local Aboriginal communities. Responding to the following statement, *'I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site'*, only nine of the 18 participants agreed with the statement. A disparity was revealed with the remainder of the participants. Four participants disagreed and five were neutral in their stance. This led to most participants to agree with engaging and building relationships with families and communities being positioned in factor 2. Factor 2 in this study was characterised as learning with Aboriginal families and communities. Furthermore, understandings of cultural competence for participants in factor 2 centred on developing relationships with their families and communities. In contrast, participants in factor 1 placed little value on working with their families and communities. This is contrary to best practice as advocated by the review of the literature and the EYLF (DEEWR 2010).

The EYLF calls for educators to work closely with their local Aboriginal families and communities to promote positive learning outcomes for all children (DEEWR 2010; Milgate 2016). As noted previously, a willingness to engage in a journey of critical reflection prompts individuals to make sense of experiences leading to personal transformation that can disrupt dominant narratives. By way of an example, Boylorn and Orbe (2014) assert the use of autoethnography to structure a process of critical reflection. Autoethnography as a form of pedagogy encourages individuals to apply ‘a critical lens, alongside an introspective and outward one, to make sense of where we are in the context of our cultural communities’ (Boylorn & Orbe 2014, p. 17). As discussed, undertaking a journey enables individuals to critically analyse ways of being and doing, that is, question what we know and how we know and how our beliefs and behaviours manifest itself in all that we do (or don’t do) (Lampbert 2005, p. 89).

In keeping with the theme of this chapter, ‘ways of doing’, most participants in both the interviews and the Cultural Competence Q sort data related their learning about cultural competence to undertaking a journey. Responding to the statement, *‘Developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development’*, 15 of the 18 participants agreed with the statement. One participant disagreed and two were neutral in their responses. One participant agreed with the statement and also provided the following comment:

There is always room for improvement. The danger of feeling that one is confident in attaining a high level of cultural competence is a step toward someone stopping to actively listen and learn. (Q sort participant seven)

Based on this research it can be concluded that a ‘not knowing’ stance is important. Checking one’s assumptions is equally important. It has been established in section 6.4 that cultural competence is interactive and there is no possibility of becoming culturally competent or reaching a ‘level’ as such but instead one enters a lifelong journey. This is affirmed by Hoskins (1999) who concedes approaching cultural competence with a ‘not knowing’ attitude in place of ‘expert’ as more appropriate. The exciting part of learning is reconceptualising our ways of knowing through a learning journey to offer new perspectives. By way of an example Kate states that:

For me it’s been much more of a journey in the last 18 months, because more specifically I have had time to talk to people, to work with people which its part of the work that I do, whereas it wasn’t necessarily a prime focus before. (Kate)

Kate emphasised that her journey has offered her new perspectives on the importance of engaging in dialogue with people. Undertaking a journey has also offered new perspectives to other participants. For instance, Mary commented:

My journey so far has opened my eyes and deepened my commitment to learning, respecting, recognising, and challenging myself. (Mary)

Similarly, Kate also symbolised cultural competence as a work in progress and a journey:

I think it's a work in progress I don't think it's anything that you say, 'Well I'm there'. It's an ongoing sort of journey. I guess that's what I'm trying to describe from my beginning of working in education in preschools and schools, it's been a work in progress of how it is I have developed an understanding of 'cultural competence'. (Kate)

Overall, participants recognised cultural competence as a journey, not a destination. Kate points to context as influencing her ways of doing and her understanding of cultural competence is a work in progress and evolving. Similarly, Sally, an Aboriginal Early Childhood educator contextualised cultural competence to her setting and local language groups, stating that:

Cultural competence is very important in an educational setting because not every culture is the same, there are different beliefs, values and ways of doing that must be understood and acknowledged by all educators when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. An understanding must be evident because just with the Aboriginal culture there are different language groups that have different ways of doing so knowledge and awareness must be a part of any educational setting. (Sally)

Sally pointed to the importance of respecting and acknowledging specific issues related to contexts. Essentially deconstructing knowledge and contextualising it within the relevant education context is important. As highlighted in the review of research on cultural competence, non-Aboriginal educator Davis (2007) used deconstructive talk and critical reflection to challenge her whiteness, creating a space of cultural learning. Missing from Sallys' narrative above is advocacy for opportunities to co-construct understandings in partnership with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, children, families and communities, essentially taking a cultural humility approach of valuing collaborative partnerships with people in learning. On the other hand, June an Aboriginal Early Childhood educator believed that collaborative work is imperative. June stated that:

I believe that it is up to the educators within the centres to reflect, think about and put into an "action plan" what are the centre issues and how this will be addressed as a collaborative approach within the service. So, it is important that educators empower themselves to look for different ways of belonging, being and becoming in engaging with local Aboriginal children and their families. (June)

June emphasized the need for collaboration amongst all stakeholders to work towards creative ways to engage with local Aboriginal children and families. Milgate (2016) affirms that schools that have empowering relationships with the Aboriginal families and communities contribute to building cultural capital between all stakeholders (Milgate 2016). Milgate also provides an extensive list of suggestions for ways that schools can engage with local Aboriginal communities beginning with the strengths of the community to develop collaborative partnerships (Milgate 2016). Aboriginal Early Childhood educator, Jenny, also mentioned collaborative relationships noting cultural competence is:

about the relationships that we have with the wider community and it's about the children to me. The competency is also about advocating as well. (Jenny)

Part of the advocacy that Jenny refers to is also related to the notion of ethics in early childhood. This is discussed at length in the next section.

Thus far, it has been maintained that this research was not intended to seek 'truth' nor categorize cultural competence but more to communicate what educators are saying and doing at present in relationship to the concept of cultural competence. What has been emphasized thus far, is the importance of deconstructing understandings related to authoritative constructions of cultural competence. There has been emphasis on continuing the journey and 'doing' in a way that is collaborative to inspire exploration and co-construction of the concept of cultural competence. Participant Laura affirms that:

I can say that in the current space and in the current time which I am at, I am open to the possibilities. (Laura)

Laura is pointing to the importance of undertaking a journey: a quest to interrogate how particular claims or concepts are normalised, that is how they come to be treated as if it were true knowledge (Dalberg, Moss & Pence 1999, p. 30). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p. 116) encourage interrogation of concepts and frameworks when they state:

By all means let there be frameworks of normalisations, if these are wanted. But equally let us not fool ourselves about what they are or what they can do. Let us recognise their limitations and dangers, their assumptions and values. Let them not be at the expense of ignoring other ways of thinking. (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999, p. 116)

Ways of doing that deconstruct and challenge normalised practices is ethically important within the early childhood field and is an example of an ethical encounter. A more detailed account of the concept of ethical encounters is given in the following section whereby some of the commonalities and some of the differences in perspectives and understandings of the participants will be highlighted.

### **8.3 Ethical encounters**

It has been demonstrated by some of the research participants that there has been a shift in thinking from ‘a one-dimensional linear reductive thinking that excludes and closes off all other ways of thinking and doing’ to a way of doing that incorporates critical reflection (Lenz Taguchi 2010, p. 17). Deconstructive dialogue that addresses at the very least normalised practices has also been evident in some of the participants’ narratives. This is important work in the field of education. By way of an example, non-Aboriginal scholar Mckinlay shared a powerful account of the role of deconstructive talk in maintaining critical reflection. Mckinlay (2012, p. 69) affirms that sustaining critical reflection is: ‘quite easy for someone with... white skin, white identity, white power, and white privilege to forget’. Thus, she intentionally used deconstructive talk to critically reflect.

For some of the research participants the journey towards understanding cultural competence has been about acting intentionally. However, the intentionality that is referred to here is not the same intentionality that historically enacted the various policies that had devastating results for Aboriginal peoples i.e. the Stolen Generations. The intentionality that I refer to is closely tied to our requirements to act in a way that follows our professions code of ethics. Albeit with caution, which will be discussed later in this section. In Australia, early childhood educators are guided by the Early Years Learning Framework to ‘reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (DEEWR 2010, p. 24). Several documents support our work to act in a professional manner. These documents include but are not limited to: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989b) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

Pertinent to our work is the Early Childhood Australia’s Code of Ethics (2016) that is informed by the above documents. This Code of Ethics provides a framework for reflection about the ethical responsibilities of early childhood professionals. Code of ethics is defined as the ‘core aspirational values of the profession and provides guidance for professional decision making especially when there are conflicting obligations or responsibilities’ (Early Childhood Australia 2016). We are professionally responsible to the children and families we work with, this inevitably means that we need to take an ethical stance. Being an ethical educator requires that we consider the perspectives of other people in determining the best course of action within our pedagogy (Early Childhood Australia 2016).

The Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics (2016) plays a significant role in informing our work, but in saying that, sometimes our practice is guided not necessarily by what we think is right based on our values but based on what normalized narratives and discourse say is 'right'. By way of an example, experienced Early Childhood educator, Laura stated previously (see section 6.3) that normalized master-narratives contribute to maintaining the status quo. Laura stated that:

My colleagues and I are always seeking ways to understand ourselves and those around us. Every policy that is created is discussed in terms of its ethical construct and whose voice and values it favours. (Laura)

Laura is adamant that not everything can be known and not everything is about the acquisition of knowledge. Laura's ways of doing and her ways of working focusses in on ethics and morals related to right and wrong. Her ways of doing cultivates a culture of ethics. This is demonstrated in her talk of scrutinizing policy in terms of its ethical construct. For Laura ethics are 'conceptualised from a relational standpoint' where potential actions are situated, conditional and at times uncertain (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2015, p. 174). Laura works from the view that ethics is not universalistic and draws on ethical practices which foregrounds personal responsibility to making decisions (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, p. 13). Furthermore, Laura recognises the aggression inherent in universal and normative thinking and is interested in ethics as relational and practices that do not 'grasp the Other to make the Other into the Same' (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, p. 13). Laura is more concerned with regenerating an 'ethics of responsibility' in place of the prevalent normalized ways of being and doing that dictates what ought to be done (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, p. 13).

Laura's ways of knowing, being and doing is reflective of the philosophical writings of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969) who argued that: 'we cannot know the other in the same way that we know about things in the world' (Chalmers 2005, p. 160). Our knowing about things in the world is what Hall (1997) refers to as a representation. Hall (1997) maintains that: 'Representation is a part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture' (Hall 1997, p. 15). There is no perceptible fixed stable meaning attached to any object, person or concept. Consequently, language is a medium through which we make sense of the world. Some of the issues emerging from the review of research in Chapter Two suggested that institutional policies and curriculum frameworks are laden with language that perpetuate dominant discourses that position Aboriginal peoples as 'Other'. As noted previously, critical reflection has an important role to play in questioning and interrogating ways of doing that function to

represent the other as inferior. Murdock (cited in Mackay and O'Sullivan 1999 p. 28) confirms:

We also need to ask who orchestrates these representations? Who is licensed to talk about other people's experience? Who is empowered to ventriloquize other people's opinion? ...Who chooses who will be heard and who will be consigned to silence, who will be seen and who will remain invisible? Who decides which viewpoints will be taken seriously? (Murdock cited in Mackay and O'Sullivan 1999, p. 28)

Erroneous representations in Aboriginal education will always be present through policy, practice and everyday discourse. Durnham and Kellner (2006, p. xiv) maintain that: 'Cultural texts are saturated with social meanings, they generate political effects, reproducing or opposing governing social institutions and relations of domination and subordination' (Durham & Kellner 2006, p. xiv). Sometimes our limited understanding leads to cultural representations that misrepresents and contributes to discourse that perpetuates injustices.

The works of French philosopher (1969) Levinas may provide 'a more just and ethical way of combating the adverse consequences resulting from the (mis)representation of Indigenous people' (Chalmers 2005, p. 160). One way is to review the purpose of ethics. The Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics (2016) as a framework is indicative of the values we hold as early childhood professionals and makes explicit the ethical responsibilities we have. It can guide us in our interactions but doesn't necessarily challenge us in respect to the acts and words we exchange daily. Levinas (1969 in Chambers 2005) maintains that in the process of seeking to know others 'is to do *violence* to the other' (Chambers 2005, p. 161). The Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics (2016) governs and enforces the way in which we relate to one another. To overcome this, Levinas (1969 in Chambers 2005, p. 163) advocates 'dialogue, discourse or communication as the means to overcome the violence that can be done to the other'. This ensures that the representation of the other is provided by the other (Chambers 2005). Consequently, educators can in every ethical encounter interrogate dialogue and the intention of practices.

As noted above, Laura's ways of doing in relation to the ethical encounters she faced are based on principles related to honesty and integrity. She advocates the importance of interrogating the purpose of cultural competence and the value we individually place on this. For Laura, her ways of doing are founded on challenging the 'existing leviathan' (Laura). Another participant, Paula, previously referred to the notion of euro centricity as an obstruction to her ways of doing (see section 6.3), she commented:

I think that the biggest problem that we have as educators is that we use a very white centric way of thinking about things and a white centric way of sharing information in an Aboriginal culture that doesn't work that way. So, we look at things and put our headset on them and it's not right, and yet we are constantly trying to mould and shape and push things into an education system that often runs very counter to the deep knowledge and traditions and learning of a lot of Aboriginal people and I don't think that a lot of teachers get that. (Paula)

Paula referred to eurocentrism as an ideological system of knowledge that molds and shapes individual's ways of being and doing. Paula also highlights how we interpret the world in terms of Western values and experiences that is counterproductive to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. Paula's narrative as an ethical encounter, highlights how sometimes educators implicitly exclude other ways of being and doing. It is apparent from both Laura and Paula's responses that ethics and all it entails is core to our pedagogical practices. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) draw our attention to the challenges educators face as they reflect on every day actions and decisions either individually or collectively and then respond with respect for all concerned. Laura and Paula both demonstrated in their narrative the importance of responding with respect. This begins with understanding as Joan reported:

Cultural competence is very much about how it becomes an understanding, how it becomes part of life, it needs to become part of my life in order for me to understand other people – and myself - so I reckon the work for us as educators is about ensuring that educators, children, families and society understand that cultural competence is interwoven. It has to be interwoven so that it becomes part of the way people think and live. (Joan)

For some of the participants, their inquiries into cultural competence as an ethical encounter led to resisting the governing ways of doing that normalizes thinking and practices and further encouraged them to be provocative in their responses. As noted above, Laura referred to creating a culture of ethics that challenges 'associated concepts of normality and the norm and the role of the expert who can define what is normal and desirable' (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, p. 17). A culture of ethics is also about being open to possibilities and making ethical choices. For instance, Joan talked about developing a vision for her early childhood centre:

It's a bit like developing a vision, you can't ideally say you want a vision for this Centre by June; you work through the process and overtime your vision develops and changes including cultural aspects as well. (Joan)

A vision statement within early childhood services that is underpinned by professional Code of Ethics can guide the policies and decision-making practices within a service. It has been established that there is always more than one possibility therefore we must make

choices, and these choices must be respectful of all involved. This is ethics in action. Mary, an experienced early childhood Director works with her teachers:

we look at where we've come from and what our beliefs and morals are and how we've come to that. (Mary)

Mary acts intentionally and strategically to interrupt the ordinary. Being intentional and strategic invites educators to '...uncover and question assumed knowledges, and to provide opportunities to engage with new understandings' (Hard, Press & Gibson 2013, p. 331). Such an approach disrupts a 'single fixed truth' (Mac Naughton 2005, p. 130) of cultural competence. This acts as a catalyst for broadening perspectives and understandings that work towards thinking about 'how things could be' in place of 'should be'. By way of an example, Joan clarified:

Cultural competence for me is very much relationship based, respectful and applicable across cultures. There are probably some unique aspects and attributes, aspects probably for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures but one of the things I learnt is that cultural competence is about me and for me ... I must admit I used to think it was about other people, to my shame! (Joan)

Joan highlights in her narrative an ethical encounter, one that highlights an aspect of her journey towards cultural competence with relationships at the centre. It has already been established the importance of developing respectful relationships with Aboriginal families and communities (Milgate 2016). As noted in the review of the literature, establishing these relationships is vital for not only Aboriginal parents, families and communities to engage with education services but for all stakeholders (Trudgett & Grace 2011). Rogers (2015, p. 172) elaborates and suggests that educators critically reflect on aspects of self. Rogers (2015, p. 172) states:

Connecting to our students through the relationships we form with them relies on our knowledge of ourselves. This goes much further than our teaching skills or educational practice – knowing ourselves deeply, looking at our own beliefs, values and biases, allows us to then look at how we teach and see this from new angles. (Rogers 2015, p. 172)

Rogers (2015) affirms points made throughout this research that our personal beliefs, biases, and ways of viewing the world influence the relationships we develop and the journey we undertake. Critical reflection enables educators to make informed fair decisions' that benefits all children and families (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Farmer & Dockett 2014, p. 112). Joan demonstrates her change in thinking and challenged her own assumptions that cultural competence was about 'other people'. Her journey was one of rethinking cultural competence, reflecting critically and challenging assumptions. Joan has actually enunciated a cultural humility approach where she undertook critical and analytic

reflective thinking as the first step towards ‘a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique’ (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia 1998). Underlying this is the knowledge that we are never finished, or reach an end-point. Participant Joan states that:

[W]hen we get to that point where we think ‘ok I know it all’ then we are probably at that point where actually we don’t know it all, just the fact that we think like that tells me something. (Joan)

Similarly, Laura stated:

If you don’t sit in doubt how are you ever going to be culturally competent, because you can’t be certain, if you think you’re certain, you’re not. (Laura)

We can never arrive at a point where we are done learning, therefore, taking time to critically reflect and engage in dialogue is vital in all our work. This is a journey where we critique and examine our personal lenses. By way of an example Robertson (2006, p. 160) states that ‘in the ethics of encounters, we are obliged to be cautious and questioning in our gaze [lense] and in our subsequent use of it’. Educators who gaze upon themselves and take on a role as an ‘inquisitive philosopher and critically reflective practitioner’, potentially position themselves to be open to new ways of knowing, being and doing (Jovanovic and Roder 2012, p. 140). The section below describes participants position concerning cultural competence as an ethic of resistance.

#### ***8.4 Spaces of encounter***

The research has demonstrated that the concept of cultural competence is a construct that has been developed to magnify a lens upon Aboriginal people as something that can be known about. Such understanding then becomes discourse that then becomes a ‘truth’. As mentioned in the review of the research, these types of dominant discourses or regimes of truth serve a regulatory function that provide the means in which groups are governed as educators are also governed through these discourses. By way of an example, dominant discourses related to cultural competence work to organise our everyday experiences and pedagogy (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, pp. 15–18).

Instead of finding ourselves bowing to dominant discourses, a stance of being open to possibilities and open to ways of doing that lead to transformative change is the focus. Within the research an image of the early childhood educator as researcher and reflective thinker has emerged (Mac Naughton 2005; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw 2010). Therefore, opportunities to critically reflect and explore cultural competence are a must. Cave, Connerton, Honig and Robertson (2012, p. 60) suggest creating ‘a ‘space of encounter’ where educators have opportunity to share and exchange wonderings and knowledge to

enable new understandings to emerge'. Additionally, a growing body of research in the field of education places emphasis on educators undertaking professional development activities to broaden individual awareness, knowledge and skills about other cultures.

It has been established that cultural competence has been operationalised as learning about the history and characteristics of cultures. This does very little to disrupt deeply held cultural ideologies. Disregarding or not reflecting on our ways of knowing about and ways of doing 'cultural competence' can lead the educator to reproduce dominant assumptions about the concept of cultural competence. As noted previously, Sheridan et al. (2009) points to the necessity of having a highly competent workforce for the early childhood field. Professional development can provide the path to achieving this goal. Therefore, the stance taken in this research is that professional learning communities are essential in terms of improving professional practice and positively influencing educators' pedagogy through critical reflection. Aboriginal early childhood educator June stated that:

All educators should undertake some form of professional learning in order that they expand upon their knowledge. So, it is about the educator adding to their individual tool box. (June)

June signifies the importance of expanding our knowledge base. On the other hand, when referring to professional development activities Ruth stated that:

I can attend all types of manner of professional development and tick off that I have participated but does that necessarily mean I am culturally competent? (Ruth)

Ruth echoes the sentiments held by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998, p. 119) who affirm that the, 'equating of cultural competence with simply having completed a past series of training sessions is an inadequate and potentially harmful model of professional development'. Ruth raises a pertinent question here about the usefulness of such professional development opportunities that do not contribute to transformation in pedagogy. In general, professional development opportunities although well-intentioned should challenge and reconceptualise the ongoing colonial effects and perpetuation of deficit discourse. It was identified in the review of the literature that training in 'cultural competency and professional development' be ongoing for teachers (The National Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECB) network 2012, p. 6). As Ruth suggests caution needs to be exercised as some forms of professional development work to serve the needs of the status quo. Participant Mary provides a counter-narrative, Mary reveals that:

I am hoping that as the leader I am creating learning opportunities for our team to reflect upon their practices, for example, staff have said, "I actually found that this was impacting on my practice", and "I feel we need to do more of that, how can we

access that?”. Through developing shared understanding and processes we are relating as a team and as a result we are able to demonstrate that we really want to learn and grow and engage and be able to provide a quality culturally competent program at our centre. (Mary)

Mary demonstrates positioning herself and her staff team in a space of encounter where their thinking and ways of doing potentially begin to disrupt normalized practices, and lead to new ways of doing. This is the core of our work, being critically reflective practitioners and disrupting normalized practices. At the core of professional development opportunities is the need to critically interrogate the purpose of the learning. It has been identified by some of the participants in this section and a previous section (see section 7.3) concerns about cultural competence professional development. Professional development opportunities that are taken as spaces of encounters and that challenge us to think more critically can create a shift in thinking that causes a ‘crisis in thought’ (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p. 123). As we encounter this space we struggle with concepts and meanings but then move to a new way of doing that produces new opportunities and new lenses. By way of an example, Laura demonstrates that a journey towards cultural competence requires a stance that values reciprocity and listening. Laura explains that:

A teacher who is on the journey of cultural competence will understand that the curriculum will be created by those children, families and the community with the educators. It will require reciprocity and for the service to become a professional learning community ... They must use the pedagogy of listening – to the child and family voice, listening with all their senses, listening to hear and learn. (Laura)

Enacting a pedagogy of listening helps to broaden our understandings of cultural competence and to act as learners on a journey to bring about change. A pedagogy of listening is imperative as listening for the sake of just listening becomes nothing more than ‘another colonizing apparatus’ (Cannella & Viruru 2004, pp. 146–147). In addition to listening, Ladson-Billings (2001, p. 98) affirms that cultural competence is present when the educator understands culture and its role in education; takes responsibility for learning about students’ culture and community; and uses students culture as a basis for learning. Laura draws on the importance of listening to families and communities and most importantly listening to learn and speaks of constructing curriculum in collaboration with children, families and communities. As noted in previous sections, Carla Rinaldi (2006, p. 65) talks of the complex nature of listening, stating that:

Listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and at the same time a suspension of our judgement and above all our prejudices; it requires openness to change.

Rinaldi’s quote is reminiscent of Geneva Gay’s (2010, p. 69) view on effective teaching pedagogy as ‘anchored in caring, commitment, cultural competence’ all of which is

‘filtered through cultural screens [that] both students and teachers bring to the classroom’. Laura also speaks of the expectations placed upon educators by the system to achieve outcomes stating that:

Even though there might be good intentions the system in which we work actually works against those good intentions for us to become culturally competent. It doesn’t open us up to yarning about possibilities, other possibilities other ways, there only seems to be the one way of doing something and the one set of measurements that we have to do good in, we don’t question enough the system and whether or not the system is actually supporting us to achieve the outcomes that we say that we are aiming for. (Laura)

Laura points to issues of power and privilege that she covertly perceives woven throughout the system and the lack of support provided to challenge the concerns. Laura also referred to similar constraints in a previous section (see section 7.2). It can thus be suggested that good intentions do little more than reify normalised practices and privilege the status quo (Castagno 2014). Castagno (2014, p. 85) elaborates further and maintains that ‘these efforts ... end up sustaining the status quo rather than facilitating social change toward equity’. As noted previously, this highlights the need for educators to act intentionally and journey towards ways of doing transformative work through enacting an ethic of resistance. Lenz Taguchi (2006) defines an ethic of resistance as:

conscious acts of thinking deeply about the assumptions and taken-for-granted notions we bring with us (often without awareness) as we engage in our daily work with children. As we practice an ethic of resistance, we deconstruct, or take apart, what we “know to be true”, to reflect on it, analyze it, criticize it, and resist its seductive powers arising from its familiarity. (Lenz Taguchi 2006, p. 259)

Applying such an ethic of resistance has the potential to disrupt unequal power relationships and disrupt deficit discourse. This must happen in relationship with other people. Working with families and communities conveys to the families valuing of their ways of knowing, being and doing as their child’s first educator. In her critical reflection of whiteness, Davis (2005, p. 184) shared a story of ‘Re-meeting whiteness’. She shared that part of her journey of questioning helped her interrogate the appropriateness of ‘Dreamtime’ books in the curriculum. Davis (2005, p. 185) recognised that all she had achieved was positioning Aboriginal people and culture as ‘other’ reflecting that:

I think back to my teaching as a whole – I didn’t attempt to contact, or invite in, the indigenous communities of the centre where I worked nor did I contact other communities that lived and worked around our centre...I worked from my white, narrow and arrogant perspective of what was needed to integrate throughout *my* curriculum. (Davis 2005, p. 186)

Davis (2005) demonstrates how an ethic of resistance and deconstructive talk enabled her to critique her practices of excluding her local Aboriginal communities. This narrative is

common and has highlighted how relationships and engagement with Aboriginal families and communities has potential to strengthen and contextualise educators' curriculum to suit all stakeholders. An ethic of resistance to confront and critically reflect on inequitable pedagogies and assumptions, what I refer to as upsetting racialized blind spots is crucial. When we are confronted with racialized practices, 'we are called to respond – although knowing how to respond can be unsettling' (Cheeseman & Kocher cited in Fleet, Patterson & Robertson 2012, p. 304). Navigating around these blind spots can be uncomfortable and rarely discussed by educators but it is vital to challenge 'regimes of truth' that contribute to racialized practices.

From the findings of this research, it was articulated at the end of Chapter six and Chapter seven several ways in which participants' engagement with cultural competence has transpired at different levels. Table 14 highlighted a framework of positioning self in relationship to 'ways of knowing' about cultural competence; Table 15 highlighted a structure of positioning self in 'ways of being' culturally competent. Table 16 below emphasizes a framework of positioning self in 'ways of doing' cultural competence. This aligns with Karen Martin's (2003) Aboriginal research framework - ways of being, knowing, and doing (see section 3.2).

As discussed in Chapter three, ways of knowing reflect the numerous ways in which context contributes to learning. This learning is inclusive of entities of land, animal, plants, water systems and people (Martin 2003, p. 209). Within this realm of ways of knowing, Martin (2003, p. 209) accentuates 'no one person or Entity knows all' which is congruent with the stance taken in this research that educators begin from a place of not knowing to question, reflect and extend their understandings of cultural competence. In this research, ways of knowing incorporates an element of challenging one's unconscious resistance to disrupting normalised views of cultural competence.

Martin (2003) articulates ways of being as about 'the rights we earn by fulfilling relations to Entities of country and self' (Martin 2003, p. 209). In this research, ways of being is about acknowledging that there are different types of knowledges at different levels of operation informed by one's stance on critical reflection. Ways of being incorporate reconceptualising the purpose of cultural competence through a decolonising lens and responding appropriately to move towards equity and social justice. Our ways of being culturally competent evolve as contexts change so we are in an ongoing shifting state of constantly problematising cultural competence as a competency (Martin 2003, p. 210).

Finally, Martin (2003) affirms that ways of doing become a combination and expression of our ways of knowing and ways of being. Ways of doing in this research were represented as acting intentionally to disrupt normalising discourses and practices of cultural competence; developing an ethic of resistance and a pedagogy of listening to enable critical thinking and reflection; working collaboratively with Aboriginal families and communities to effect systemic social change for equity and social justice. These three ways of discovering have important implications for educator's in terms of how they approach operationalising cultural competence.

This research is an illustration of enacting Martin's (2003) ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing to deconstruct how we demonstrate cultural competence (Do), respectfully and rightfully be culturally competent (Being) through what we know about cultural competence (Knowing). Table 16 below accentuates a framework of learning from a place of not knowing about cultural competence to a position of challenging reductive notions that suggest one can 'know' and 'be competent' in culture. It merges diverse understandings of cultural competence as socially constructed, complex and subjective. The framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing cultural competence seeks to provide opportunities for individuals to question cultural competence in ethical encounters that disrupt dominant discourses related to the concept. The table also emphasizes that we are always in constant state of beginning the journey and continuing the journey.

The framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing 'cultural competence' is valuable as a point of discussion and reflection. There is a reluctance to 'orchestrate representations' of where the research participants are positioned within this framework (Murdock cited in Mackay & O'Sullivan 1999, p. 28). Nevertheless, it is apparent that the research participants who provided narratives of their understandings of cultural competence could be positioned as between emerging and evolving their understandings of cultural competence. This is based on the idea that there are 'degrees of agreement about what counts as truth' in relation to the concept of cultural competence (Barker & Galaskinski 2001, p. 66).

| Framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing 'cultural competence'. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                          | Beginning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Emerging                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evolving                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Ways of knowing</b>                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing that knowledge about cultural competence is socially constructed</li> <li>• Building on partial understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures</li> <li>• Beginning to silently challenge 'regimes of truth'.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to begin to challenge ongoing colonial effects</li> <li>• Knowing about the state of unconsciousness of privilege</li> <li>• Knowing how to disrupt deficit discourse.</li> </ul>                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing about and disrupting normalised narratives</li> <li>• Problematising assumptions about culture and competence</li> <li>• Challenging reductive notions that suggest one can 'know' and 'be competent' in culture</li> </ul>           |
| <b>Ways of being</b>                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unconsciously resisting dominant discourse</li> <li>• Engaging with good intentions and niceness</li> <li>• Being critically reflective by safely citing historical examples of white privilege.</li> </ul>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decolonising selves and practices</li> <li>• Examining own position in society and developing a critical capacity to interrogate how privilege works</li> <li>• Being mindful of the great diversity of meaning about cultural competence.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disrupting normalized practices</li> <li>• Being attentive to privilege counter-stories of cultural competence</li> <li>• Problematising cultural competence as a competency.</li> </ul>                                                      |
| <b>Ways of doing</b>                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partly disrupting normalising discourses and practices</li> <li>• Beginning to act intentionally to disrupt the norm</li> <li>• Being open to sharing and exchanging wonderings and knowledge of cultural competence.</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking deconstructive dialogue</li> <li>• Developing strong relationships with Aboriginal families and communities</li> <li>• Developing; an ethic of resistance; a pedagogy of listening; critical thinking and reflection.</li> </ul>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deconstructing issues of power, privilege, oppression and unequal power relationships</li> <li>• Upsetting racialized blind spots</li> <li>• Contributing collaboratively to systemic social change for equity and social justice.</li> </ul> |

**Table 16: Framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing 'cultural competence'.**

To conclude this section, it is apparent that enacting a pedagogy of listening with deconstructive talk, educators can navigate the multiplicity of pedagogical encounters to ensure that new opportunities are created for understanding cultural competence in their work.

### **8.5 Conclusion**

In summary, it has been demonstrated that cultural competence is constructed and produced in acts of interpretation (Steedman 1991). Educators have an ethical responsibility to ensure that the concept is not located within a panacea of deficit (Rose 2009). Therefore, educators will need to be mindful of not only the ways certain concepts and discourses essentialize cultures but also be mindful of the values that inform our work around cultural competence. Although professional learning is pivotal in enacting transformative pedagogies, educators need the time to encounter spaces to confront and challenge their own assumptions that are primarily based on dominant discourses. This begins with ways of doing that encourage educators to become more critically reflective of the privileges and power associated with concepts that normalize practice and govern individual or groups of people.

It was also noted that some educators perceived cultural competence as an achievement or mastery of outcomes and other educators recognised cultural competence to be more of an ongoing process of learning about oneself and others. Undertaking a learning journey collaboratively recognises that mastery or competence is not possible and that power operates on, in and through dominant discourses. Through professional learning opportunities educators can work to problematise cultural competence as a competency to achieve and begin to construct counter-discourses about the concept of cultural competence. Additionally, spaces for encounters were considered to have potential to encourage the co-construction of knowledge, disrupt our current understandings and incite critical reflection for transformation.

The findings from the three discussion chapters have informed the development of a framework where individuals can position their relationship to ‘ways of knowing, being and doing’ cultural competence. These three ways of discovering have important implications for educator’s in terms of how they approach operationalising cultural competence. Connecting with the complexity and layers of interpretations of cultural competence and a willingness of being open to possibilities through the enactment of a pedagogy of listening offer opportunity to disrupt the current taken for granted discourses.

The final chapter will summarise the pertinent findings of this research and suggest ways forward in further research.

## CHAPTER NINE: Knowledge and Knowing

### 9.1 Introduction

This research has come from a perspective which understands the need to question what we think we ‘know’. In thinking about culture, it is interesting to question how have we come to know what we know? What does it mean to ‘know’ something? On the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2017, we were confronted with the following media headline: *Officer sorry for putting eight-year-old Indigenous boy into police van to teach him a lesson* (Davidson 2017). The police were called to a school in a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory after an argument between the eight-year-old boy and another student. The police officer responded by attending the child’s classroom, walking the child out and placing the young boy into the back of a police van ‘to teach him a lesson’. One can only imagine the terror and fear that must have been running through that eight-year-old child’s body. The Ngukurr community have requested a full inquiry into what happened. I have many questions: Were the community approached to assist the teacher in this encounter? How will this incident affect the relationships between the child, the teacher and the community? How did the educators’ knowledge or lack of knowledge about the child influence his/her decision? The Northern Territory Department of Education is reviewing the matter and will report on the processes undertaken by the school. This media report of the treatment of this eight year old Aboriginal student is reflective of Aboriginal education in colonial Australia that has continued into contemporary Australia.

The aim of this research was to explore educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Not only is there an expectation from Australian education authorities that educators will strengthen their cultural competence, previous research highlights several recommendations for educators to be ‘culturally competent’ (Goodwin 2012; Milgate & Giles-Brown 2013; SNAICC 2013). More so, educators should have the knowledge and skills to interact appropriately and support Aboriginal students effectively (DEEWR 2010, p. 23). It is thought that if educators were culturally competent, they would be more likely to create environments supportive of Aboriginal students and improve education outcomes (Goodwin 2012; Radich 2012). Nearly eight years after the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework there is a degree of ambiguity surrounding the term ‘cultural competence’ and very little improvement in outcomes (DEEWR 2010). This is evident in the lack of scholarship about cultural competence in the education field and the lack of congruent understandings amongst educators. Due to the

vague nature of cultural competence, exploring educators' understandings and perspectives of cultural competence was an important area to research, as it is educators' understandings in practice. In keeping with the EYLFs stance that 'we all strengthen our cultural competence' (DEEWR 2010, p. 21) the research raised two key questions:

1. What are educators' understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence as outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework?
2. How do educators describe their proficiency with cultural competence?

The term 'understanding' was purposely used to enable participants to grapple, reflect upon and critique what they know and how they know relative to the concept of cultural competence. To support this research, I first positioned myself as an Aboriginal researcher and accordingly adopted principles on 'Indigenist' research proposed by Aboriginal scholar Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1999). Indigenist research can be summarised as research that engages with resistance discourse that challenges oppressive practices and processes that stem from colonisation. Indigenist research is also research that privileges Indigenous voices (Rigney 1999). A convergence model was utilised where both Indigenous and Western praxis not only privileged the array of voices but also cast doubt on dominant discourses. Two methods were used to enable multiple understandings to emerge. First, Q methodology was used to access as many alternative perspectives as possible and, with the use of correlation and factor analytic techniques, group and describe these views to map educators' understandings of and perspectives about cultural competence. Second, semi-structured interviews using an Indigenous methodology of yarning were conducted to gain a deep comprehensive account of educators' understandings and perspectives towards cultural competence and to enable new understandings of cultural competence to emerge. The methods chosen were based on their capabilities to:

1. investigate a relatively unexplored phenomenon;
2. be exploratory in nature to allow participants voices to prevail;
3. privilege the narratives of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early years educators;
4. complement the strengths of using a single design to explore the diverse views and perspectives of educators, and

5. provide a counter-story to the dominant discourses and narratives of cultural competence.

There was an emphasis on privileging the participants' voices and lived experiences. As an Aboriginal researcher who has been immersed in experiences related to the importance of respectfully listening with all of our senses it was important that I also presented the participants' voices with respect and humility.

There were clearly limitations inherent in both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A limitation relevant to this research was the relatively small sample sized used in both methods. Eighteen educators participated in the online Q sort and nine educators participated in the semi-structured interviews. The emphasis of this research was on exploring educator's meanings and representations of cultural competence. The following sections discuss the implications and possibilities of cultural competence, beginning with a recap of the main points associated with the concept of cultural competence.

## ***9.2 Complexities of Cultural Competence***

Australian history and the legacy of colonialism has contributed to and impacted significantly on education and continues to influence education systems today. The use of Foucauldian concepts of normalization and governmentality and drawing on aspects of Critical Race Theory permitted deconstruction of language and discourses related to cultural competence that contribute to racialized discourses that work to essentialise Indigenous cultures. These types of discourses are 'organised to make itself persuasive' (Gill 1996, p. 143).

Foucault's work draws our attention to regimes of truth that 'sometimes work against social justice by excluding, rather than including, different ways of understanding and living in the world' (Campbell & Page 2003, p. 290). The review of the research on Aboriginal education in Australia argued that Aboriginal children are entering a colonial, dominant system of education that is premised on Western values. This led into discussion about the different ways that data compartmentalizes Aboriginal students from non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students are forced to partake in culturally unfair assessment practices that serve to perpetuate difference and contribute to the discourse of 'the failing Aboriginal child'. This type of unfair 'discourse-stacking' maintains and perpetuates disadvantage while maintaining the dominant position of the status quo (Delpit 1993, p. 294).

This research has demonstrated that Aboriginal children are normalized as needing support through various Aboriginal education plans and policies that suit the Western construct of what is considered successful schooling. This is a powerful example of persuasive discourse. Successive Aboriginal education plans by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) were released with a primary focus of improving attendance. It was argued in the review of such reports and research that other factors need to be considered. By way of an example, turning the gaze away from the perceived inferiority of Aboriginal peoples and focussing on how the system perpetuates racialized discourse that produce, reproduce and maintain the status quo.

In the review of the research, it was established that past racializing policies contribute to contemporary policies that perpetuate discourses of marginalisation and which are reinforced through education institutional directives. By way of an example, cultural competence in the EYLF is a type of discourse that generates an 'authoritative consensus about what needs to be done ...and how it should be done', as a representation of a regime of truth (Gore 1993 cited in Mac Naughton 2005, p. 30). It was also determined that there is an assumption that 'cultural competence' is a 'truth' to be defined and described (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p. 93). Primarily a social construct it operates predominantly from Eurocentric worldviews and theories deeply influenced by philosophies and assumptions that position the 'other' as different. The concept works to position the 'culturally competent' person as in a position of power, as the 'expert', while also reinforcing existing stereotypes about the 'other'. I argue that the concept of cultural competence has an underlying assimilatory goal at play.

A review of the research also pointed to aspects of Critical Race Theory to problematise racialized policies and frameworks and to 'cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises' especially held by the status quo (Delgado & Stefancic 2001, p. 144). This highlights that aspects of Critical Race Theory provide a useful conceptual framework to: 1) consider racism as pervasive; 2) disrupt and deconstruct dominant ideologies; 3) commit to social justice; and 4) identify the narratives and experiential knowledge of subjects. This thesis, has created counter-stories that conceptualise Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early years educator's understandings and perspectives of cultural competence.

Participant's responded to the first research question: *What are educators' understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence as outlined*

*in the Early Years Learning Framework?* The main responses by participants included that they:

- perceived cultural competence as a journey and an opportunity to develop their understanding;
- affirmed that relationships are core to developing cultural competence;
- understood cultural competence to be a normalised construct that stifles other possibilities;
- considered that discourse related to cultural competence contributed to the reproduction of dominant discursive regimes;
- contemplated that the term cultural competence is an effective code word that normalizes ‘binaries’;
- believed that some constructions and representations of cultural competence work to subordinate ‘others’;
- acknowledged that there is a hierarchy of privilege and a view of deficit in the education system that works in ways that appeals to ‘White, middle-class families’;
- took into consideration that cultural competence is represented through good intentions, thus protecting whiteness;
- contemplated association with colour-blind perspectives as preserving inequity and perpetuating deficit ideologies; and
- for some educators, instead of seeing their lack of understanding and knowledge as a means to reflect and learn, instead enacted a form of silent resistance.

The findings describe cultural competence as a dominant discursive regime that then becomes a framework that shapes educators’ understandings and actions. This works to constitute boundaries and systemic barriers that privileges some and perpetuates embedded racism for others (Dahlberg & Moss 2007). Participants were also asked to indicate their perceived level of cultural competence. This was an important aspect of the research in that self-reporting cultural competence portrays understanding in theory and practice. Participants responded to the second research question, *how do educators describe their proficiency with cultural competence?* The main responses:

- indicated that self-reporting is a highly subjective process where they situate value and worth;
- that is reflective of white values and norms; and
- is grounded in whiteness that remains invisible to non-Aboriginal educators.

Most of the research participants did not refer to cultural competence as a developmental process. This contrasts with research on cultural competence that highlights that cultural competence is more as an opportunity to gain understanding and that it is nearly impossible to ‘become competent at the culture of another’ (Dean 2001, p. 624). This was strongly reiterated by research participant 17 who undertook the Cultural Competence Q sort. Participant 17 stated: ‘One can’t claim to be culturally competent; it’s not a skills checklist to tick off’ (Participant 17 – Q sort). This was congruent with the literature that argues that one works from a position of not knowing and ‘there is no thought of competence - instead one thinks of gaining understanding (always partial) of a phenomenon that is evolving and changing’ (Dean 2001, p. 624).

The research identified that participants also held concerns with cultural competence focused professional learning. Many participants identified limitations with traditional modes of delivery of professional learning that focus on cultural competence. Most professional learning was seen as ad hoc and somewhat disorganised. I argue that what is required is a model or framework that is contextualised in collaboration with local Aboriginal communities to enable educators to enrich their understandings of Indigenous epistemologies as ways of knowing, being and doing.

### ***9.3 Future directions in cultural understanding for educators and policy***

The research findings indicate that what is required is a shift in policy from cultural competence towards cultural understanding. The following discusses several possible ways forward and the implications for educators and policy.

The findings of this research confirm the varied multiplicity of educators’ understandings and perspectives of cultural competence. Critical race and whiteness theories offered educators insight into the limitations of the discourse around cultural competence. It was evident that a few educators had undertaken a journey of developing their own understandings about cultural competence and questioned not only the discourse but their personal experiences.

It was established that the 12 educators who made up Factor 1 of the Cultural Competence Q sort that developing relationships, partnerships and connections with Aboriginal communities was shown to be generally ad hoc with little value placed on the importance of this in relation to 'being' culturally competent. On the other hand, six participants who made up Factor 2 recognised their own beliefs, assumptions and values as variables that impact on relationships and interactions with Aboriginal students, families, and communities. Critical reflection was also viewed as an important tool in questioning and interrogating self and ways of doing that function to represent the Other as inferior.

Some educators took on an authoritative and dominant stance in relation to questioning the value and worth of cultural competence. In this research, educators understood cultural competence as a work in progress. This was seen as ever evolving; and that required one to be an active agent in the critical reflection process. This understanding is vital for educators to resist the governing ways of doing that normalizes cultural competence as a racialized concept that is about the 'other' and about attaining a level of competence about the 'other'.

Some participants also emphasized the importance of questioning, deconstructing and challenging normalised practices as illustrative ethical encounters. Equally important is educators committing to and sharing their journey of developing an understanding of cultural competence that is done in collaboration with their local Aboriginal communities. This must incorporate principles of respect, reciprocity, trust and understanding; all of which underpin Indigenous epistemologies and ways of doing.

Some educators also used their understandings of cultural competence to unknowingly perpetuate binaries. Foucauldian concepts of normalisation and governance, and a framework of Critical Race Theory has valuable potential to help educators to turn the gaze upon themselves to view the self as active participants in a pervasive ideology that works to justify domination of one group over other groups (Castagno 2014). Educators can move beyond a normalized way of responding to institutional directives towards cultural competence and undertake work to facilitate ways of knowing, being and doing cultural competence.

The scholarship on Whiteness, drawn from Australian Indigenous scholar Moreton-Robinson (2000, 2004) and international scholar Castagno (2014) also enabled insight into how educator's come to know cultural competence. This scholarship and the findings of the research influenced the development of a framework of positioning self in relationship

to ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing cultural competence. This framework is reflective of Martins (2003) ways of knowing, being and doing to deconstruct how we demonstrate cultural competence (Do), respectfully and rightfully be culturally competent (Being) through what we know about cultural competence (Knowing). The framework is not intended to be viewed as a continuum of cultural competence but more about conceding that there are 'degrees of agreement about what counts as truth' in relation to the concept of cultural competence (Barker & Galaskinski 2001, p. 66). Frameworks are useful if they serve a genuine purpose. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p. 116) argue:

By all means let there be frameworks of normalisations, if these are wanted. But equally let us not fool ourselves about what they are or what they can do. Let us recognise their limitations and dangers, their assumptions and values. Let them not be at the expense of ignoring other ways of thinking. (Dahlberg et al. 1999, p. 116)

The framework of positioning self in relationship to ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing cultural competence provides educators a structure to position oneself to be open to possibilities where there is a shift from not knowing to a position of challenging reductive notions and complexifying practices (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2015, p. 21).

Findings from the research also indicate that some participants felt dissonance with institutional directives and considered there was lack of support from the education department which in turn places limitations on their developing understandings. This was of concern because dominant discursive regimes work through discourse and language to describe certain concepts and ways of being. These concepts then become a framework of sorts that we use to shape our understandings and actions and that constitute to perpetuating dominant discursive regimes that at times privilege some and disadvantage others (Dahlberg & Moss 2007, p. 31). It is recommended that the discourse of professional learning and training in cultural competence be disrupted as this discourse leads to a belief that attendance assures one will reach a level of competency. This is contradictory to the purpose of immersing oneself in a journey.

Ways of knowing and being culturally competent requires that educators critically reflect on their understandings through sharing knowledge and consolidating what is known through reciprocity and engagement with others. This means taking time to critically analyse our ways of being and doing, that is, question what we know and how we know and how our beliefs and behaviours manifest itself in all that we do (or don't do) (Lampbert 2005, p. 89). In the case of this research, professional learning communities are thought to be most beneficial for educators. As educators explore cultural competence, awareness emerges that we are shaded by our own cultural values, experiences and

understandings (Cave et al. 2012, p. 67). Therefore, as we disrupt regimes of truth we realise that we can never totally see the world from the viewpoint of another, but we can be open to disrupt our present understandings to be receptive to other narratives through authentic encounters.

There is opportunity to further embed Whiteness studies in pre-service teaching courses. Such strategies provide space to yarn and engage in inquiry enable critical conversations to occur. This provides for pre-service teachers and practising educators space to engage in critical reflection to facilitate critical praxis where educators develop deeper understandings of their cultural identity and its intersections with whiteness. This includes interrogating structure and institutions that perpetuate dominant ideologies. This corresponds with Cross (2010, p. 265) who emphasizes that for teacher education reform it is essential we analyse ‘the larger systems in place that maintain the privileges of whiteness, power, and racism along with inequities and injustices manifested by them’. Enacting Foucauldian informed methodologies would be valuable to disrupt dominant discourses that privilege groups over others.

Educational institutions can provide educators both pre-service and practising opportunity to detangle themselves from issues of power, privilege, oppression and unequal relationships. Such opportunities create spaces of encounters to challenge us to think more critically and create a shift in thinking. Educators must understand themselves before they can attempt to understand and successfully work with students (Perso 2012). As we encounter this space we struggle with concepts and meanings but then move to a new way of doing that produces new opportunities and new lenses. Ethnography is a ‘useful tool’ (Castagno 2014, p 12) to shift understandings of complex terms related to whiteness and cultural competence and where educators can learn to ‘read for equity’ (Mac Naughton 2005, p. 117).

#### ***9.4 For further research***

The findings of this research have clear implications for further research in the field of teacher education and teacher practice. It is also noted that there is a strong need to provide ongoing opportunities for dialogue at all levels of education, ideally in collaboration with universities where research is being undertaken. Some of the areas highlighted in the findings of this research that could potentially be investigated further include:

- Further investigation into the effectiveness of cultural competence frameworks in pedagogical practices.

- Researching strategies to authentically contextualise cultural competence professional learning communities in collaboration with local Aboriginal communities.
- Developing inquiry based projects within education sites, using ethnography as a tool to become critical meaning makers of cultural competence.
- Investigating Indigenous methodologies including Martins (2003) ‘ways of knowing, being and doing’ to explore multiple entry points and opportunities to disrupt and problematise the silent and unacknowledged interpretations and categorizations of cultural competence.
- Exploring how Foucauldian, Whiteness and Critical Race Theory concepts can be mobilised within education settings to enable educators to transform pedagogy.
- Researching effective strategies that work to equip pre-service teachers with an understanding of issues of power, privilege, and oppression as well as ideas about how they might educate against whiteness (Castagno, 2014, p. 49).

These research findings provide opportunity to draw on the works of Foucault and Mac Naughton and clearly provide opportunities for educators to disrupt the injustices in the present; reveal the discourses of privilege; and, rethink what we think we know in order to transform what we do (Mac Naughton 2009, pp. 190–191). These opportunities will require commitment and time. Paul Kivel (2011, p. 315) affirms that:

Sometimes change comes not in the first round, but at the second, third, or fourth. Change starts with one person questioning, challenging, speaking up and doing something to make a difference. We can each make a difference ... because each of us is already part of the community where racism exists and thrives.

A journey of transformation takes time and time needs to be inclusive of transformative work.

### ***9.5 Final Reflection***

This research was not seeking ‘truth’ or classifying cultural competence, because regardless of a change in terminology, or a shift in discourse, it does not necessarily mean that discourse of cultural competence will be eliminated (Frankenberg 1993). This research did seek to reveal what educators are saying and doing in relationship to the concept of cultural competence. Accordingly, the research illustrated the significant journey some of the educators have undertaken to identify and interrogate the construct of

cultural competence. The diverse characteristics among the participants in this research were significant because it allowed for exploration of a multidimensional construct from a range of perspectives. It has also been established that Q methodology can contribute to explorations of any topic that is of relevant to understanding other people's perspectives. Utilising yarning in semi-structured interviews has been proven to be a holistic method to draw from participants their understandings and perspectives. In this research, the use of both methods has contributed important understandings about the discourse of cultural competence.

What has been emphasized, is the importance of deconstructing understandings related to authoritative constructions of cultural competence. There has been emphasis on continuing the journey and 'doing' in a way to inspire exploration of the concept of cultural competence. Education authorities frequently position cultural competence as something to be done to/with Aboriginal peoples. This contributes to discourse of 'gap talk' (e.g., Gillborn 2008; Guenther 2013) that positions Aboriginal peoples as needing remediation. Reframing the discourse of cultural competence can occur through a combination of enacting a pedagogy of listening with deconstructive talk; and to provide us with an ethical compass with which to navigate the slippery construct of cultural competence.

This research contributes to a growing area of research. It also enlightens and leads to the development of more informed professional conversations amongst educators. If we begin with a 'narrative of hope' (Sumsion et al, 2009, p. 7), and start from a place of not knowing and utilising the right tools, educators can navigate the multiplicity of pedagogical encounters to ensure that new opportunities are created for understanding cultural competence in their work. As I conclude this research I have a deeper understanding of the unique perspectives that educators have of cultural competence. Throughout this journey, I have also had opportunities to grow and further develop my conceptual understandings of research into cultural competence. This research has raised many more questions than answers for me as an early career researcher. There is no one way of knowing, being and doing and no one answer, consequently I see this research as a narrative of hope, an 'untested feasibility' (Freire 1996, p. 83), open to possibilities and the continuation of a learning journey.

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## Appendix 1 Consent Forms

### CONSENT FORM (PHASE 1 PILOT STUDY GROUP)



## Human Research Ethics Committee CONSENT FORM

*Use this consent form when taped materials, photographs or original works are to be retained*

*This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: [Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au)*

#### SECTION 1: CONTACT AND PROJECT DETAILS

|                         |                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Researcher's Full Name: | <b>Karen Sinclair</b>                                                                                                                             |
| Contact Details:        | <b>karen.sinclair@mymail.unisa.edu.au</b>                                                                                                         |
| Supervisor's Full Name: | <b>Associate Professor Peter Gale</b>                                                                                                             |
| Contact Details:        | <b>8302 0564</b>                                                                                                                                  |
| Protocol Number:        |                                                                                                                                                   |
| Project Title:          | <b>Educators' understandings, ideas, and beliefs towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence: A Q methodological study.</b> |

#### SECTION 2: CERTIFICATION

##### Participant Certification

In signing this form, I confirm that:

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that information collected will be stored on a password protected USB memory stick at the researchers' residential address in a safe lockable filing cabinet and will be stored for a period of 5 years as suggested in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the information sheet and consent form for future reference.
- I understand that I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.

*Participants under the age of 18 normally require parental consent to be involved in research. The consent form should allow for those under the age of 18 to agree to their involvement and for a parent to give consent.*

|                                                                                              |                     |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                                                                                              |                     |             |
| <i>Participant Signature</i>                                                                 | <i>Printed Name</i> | <i>Date</i> |
| <b>Researcher Certification</b>                                                              |                     |             |
| I have explained the study to subject and consider that he/she understands what is involved. |                     |             |
|                                                                                              |                     |             |
| <i>Researcher Signature</i>                                                                  | <i>Printed Name</i> | <i>Date</i> |

Human Research Ethics Committee  
CONSENT FORM

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Current November 2011  
CRICOS Provider No. 00121B

## CONSENT FORM (PHASE 3 INTERVIEWS)

*Use this consent form when taped materials, photographs or original works are to be retained*

*This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: [Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au)*

### SECTION 1: CONTACT AND PROJECT DETAILS

|                         |                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Researcher's Full Name: | <b>Karen Sinclair</b>                                                                                                                             |
| Contact Details:        | <b>karen.sinclair@mymail.unisa.edu.au</b>                                                                                                         |
| Supervisor's Full Name: | <b>Associate Professor Peter Gale</b>                                                                                                             |
| Contact Details:        | <b>8302 0564</b>                                                                                                                                  |
| Protocol Number:        | <b>0000031116</b>                                                                                                                                 |
| Project Title:          | <b>Educators' understandings, ideas, and beliefs towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence: A Q methodological study.</b> |

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- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview. I understand that the tape will be used only for the purpose of the research.
- I understand that information collected will be stored on a password protected USB memory stick at the researchers' residential address in a safe lockable filing cabinet and will be stored for a period of 5 years as suggested in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the information sheet and consent form for future reference.
- I understand that I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.

*Participants under the age of 18 normally require parental consent to be involved in research. The consent form should allow for those under the age of 18 to agree to their involvement and for a parent to give consent.*

|                                                                                              |                     |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                                                                                              |                     |             |
| <i>Participant Signature</i>                                                                 | <i>Printed Name</i> | <i>Date</i> |
| <b>Researcher Certification</b>                                                              |                     |             |
| I have explained the study to subject and consider that he/she understands what is involved. |                     |             |
|                                                                                              |                     |             |
| <i>Researcher Signature</i>                                                                  | <i>Printed Name</i> | <i>Date</i> |

## Appendix 2 Participant information Sheets

### PHASE 1 EXPERT GROUP

## INFORMATION SHEET

**Title of the Study:** Educators' understandings, ideas and beliefs towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence: A Q methodological study

### What will I be asked to do?

You are asked to consent to participate in an anonymous online survey which will take no more than 20 minutes to complete and can be conducted wherever you can access the internet. You will be presented with a set of statements about a topic and will be asked to rate the statements on a scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

### What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

The sharing of your understandings, experiences, ideas and beliefs on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural competence as outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework will assist in gaining a more complete picture of educators' understandings ideas and beliefs in relation to this important topic. In addition, the findings of this study will expand the body of research literature on educators' understandings, ideas and beliefs towards culturally competent practices when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

### Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

You will be anonymous. The online survey will be available through *qsortonline* via the World Wide Web (WWW) at a designated Uniform Resource Locator (URL). Qsortonline is a secure web-hosted survey tool used to collect data. **No identifying information will be collected from you.** Individuals' responses will be kept confidential by the researcher and not be identified in the reporting of the research. However, the researcher cannot guarantee the confidentiality or anonymity of material transferred by email or the internet.

### Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The Investigator does not anticipate any risks from the involvement of yourself in this study. As you undergo a discovery of your own beliefs systems, perceptions and understandings about cultural competence, you may experience a level of anxiety. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomfort, please raise them with the investigator. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of South Australia, Human Research Ethics Committee. For questions

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regarding participant rights and ethical conduct, contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: 8302 3118; Email [Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au)

### **Project Support**

This research project has received ethical approval from the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee and is supported and funded by the University of South Australia.

### **How do I agree to participate?**

Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without effect or consequences. To participate in the study, navigate to the online survey link <http://qsortonline.com/qsort/EUIBATSICC/> or alternatively copy and paste the link into your internet browser, this will bring you to the informed consent form. Please read the Informed consent and click “I agree” to participate. If you should decide later that you do not wish to continue your participation in the study, please exit out of the survey. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

### **How will I receive feedback?**

Outcomes from the project will be summarised and given to you by the investigator if you would like to see them.

### **Supervisor Contact Details:**

Associate Professor Peter Gale, PhD  
David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research (DUCIER)  
Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences  
University of South Australia, City West Campus  
70 North Terrace, Adelaide SA 5000  
08 8302 0564  
[Peter.gale@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Peter.gale@unisa.edu.au)

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I hope that you will accept the invitation to be involved.**

## INFORMATION SHEET

**Title of the Study:** Educators' understandings, ideas and beliefs towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence: A Q methodological study

### What will I be asked to do?

You are asked to consent to participate in an anonymous online survey which will take no more than 20 minutes to complete and can be conducted wherever you can access the internet. You will be presented with a set of statements about a topic and will be asked to rate the statements on a scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

### What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

The sharing of your understandings, experiences, ideas and beliefs on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural competence as outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework will assist in gaining a more complete picture of educators' understandings' ideas and beliefs in relation to this important topic. In addition, the findings of this study will expand the body of research literature on educators' understandings, ideas and beliefs towards culturally competent practices when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

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### Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The Investigator does not anticipate any risks from the involvement of yourself in this study. As you undergo a discovery of your own beliefs systems, perceptions and understandings about cultural competence, you may experience a level of anxiety. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomfort, please raise them with the investigator. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of South Australia, Human Research Ethics Committee. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct, contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: 8302 3118; Email [Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au)

## **Project Support**

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### **How do I agree to participate?**

Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without effect or consequences. To participate in the study, navigate to the online survey link <http://qsortonline.com/qsort/EUIBATSICC/> or alternatively copy and paste the link into your internet browser, this will bring you to the informed consent form. Please read the Informed consent and click "I agree" to participate. If you should decide later that you do not wish to continue your participation in the study, please exit out of the survey. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

### **How will I receive feedback?**

Outcomes from the project will be summarised and given to you by the investigator if you would like to see them.

### **Supervisor Contact Details:**

Associate Professor Peter Gale, PhD  
David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research (DUCIER)  
Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences  
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08 8302 0564  
[Peter.gale@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Peter.gale@unisa.edu.au)

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I hope that you will accept the invitation to be involved.**

## INFORMATION SHEET

**Title of the Study:** Educators' understandings, ideas and beliefs towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence: A Q methodological study

### Description of the Study:

This study will investigate the subjective scope of educators' understandings, ideas and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence as it relates to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). This project is supported by the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research at the University of South Australia.

### What will I be asked to do?

Participation will involve a 30 - 45 minute interview in which you will be asked a series of questions. The **interview will be audio-recorded** and the researcher will also take notes during the interview. Upon transcription of the interview, copies will be made available to the participants to verify or expand on any information provided.

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### Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

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Your decision to participate is completely voluntary and will remain confidential. Only the researcher will know your status as a participant. None of the written or taped information will expose any identifying information. Names and work location will be withheld from the study and pseudonyms used.

### Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The Investigator does not anticipate any risks from the involvement of yourself in this study. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomfort, please raise them with the investigator. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of South Australia, Human Research Ethics Committee. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct, contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: 8302 3118; Email [Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au)

### Project Support

This research project has received ethical approval from the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee and is supported and funded by the University of South Australia.

### How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. To participate in this part of the study please email me on [karen.sinclair@mymail.unisa.edu.au](mailto:karen.sinclair@mymail.unisa.edu.au) to register your interest.

**Supervisor Contact Details:**

Associate Professor Peter Gale, PhD  
David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research (DUCIER)  
Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences  
University of South Australia, City West Campus  
70 North Terrace, Adelaide SA 5000  
08 8302 0564  
[Peter.gale@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Peter.gale@unisa.edu.au)

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I hope that you will accept the invitation to be involved.**

## Appendix 3 Factor Arrays

| Factor arrays |                                                                                                                                                 |               |    |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----|
| No.           | Statement                                                                                                                                       | Factor Arrays |    |
|               |                                                                                                                                                 | F1            | F2 |
| 1             | I endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my service.       | 2             | 3  |
| 2             | Cultural competence is an event.                                                                                                                | -3            | -3 |
| 3             | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in my service through the use of traditional images, posters and celebrations.         | -1            | -1 |
| 4             | I value different culture's ways of knowing and being.                                                                                          | 3             | 2  |
| 5             | I understand the importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.                                           | 3             | 1  |
| 6             | I take responsibility for learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' culture and community.                                 | 1             | 0  |
| 7             | I am aware of my own worldview and how it impacts on my practice.                                                                               | 1             | 2  |
| 8             | While I do not believe in the practices and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, I tolerate them.                         | -3            | -4 |
| 9             | Awareness of cultural differences is the first step to becoming a culturally competent educator.                                                | 1             | 3  |
| 10            | I feel so constrained by lack of time that I struggle to meet every child's individual needs, including cultural ones.                          | -2            | -2 |
| 11            | I have attended a 'Cultural awareness' training and am competent enough.                                                                        | -1            | -2 |
| 12            | I wait until I am given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our program so I don't do the wrong thing. | -4            | -4 |
| 13            | I mainly consult with the local Aboriginal community when there are significant events e.g. NAIDOC week, Harmony day etc.                       | -1            | -1 |
| 14            | My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs.                                             | 0             | 4  |
| 15            | I acknowledge and value Aboriginal English as a means to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging.        | 0             | 2  |
| 16            | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's learning and                                                                         | -1            | 3  |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |           |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|    | use the cultural tools of the community.                                                                                                                                                                                             |           |           |
| 17 | I intervene when I observe other staff engaging in behaviours that show cultural insensitivity, biases and prejudice.                                                                                                                | <b>2</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| 18 | It is not necessary to specifically include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence in our sites philosophy statement as all cultures should be represented.                                                       | <b>-2</b> | <b>-3</b> |
| 19 | I avoid imposing values that may conflict or be inconsistent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.                                                                                                                    | <b>0</b>  | <b>0</b>  |
| 20 | I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site.                                                                     | <b>-1</b> | <b>4</b>  |
| 21 | It is important for educators to recognise and promote culture in developing children's sense of being, becoming and belonging.                                                                                                      | <b>4</b>  | <b>2</b>  |
| 22 | I have undertaken Cultural awareness training and am happy with my current knowledge of Aboriginal cultures.                                                                                                                         | <b>-2</b> | <b>-1</b> |
| 23 | I have a clear understanding of the explicit practice in the Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, "The Journey for Educators: Growing competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures". | <b>0</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| 24 | I am aware of the differences between cultural awareness and cultural competence.                                                                                                                                                    | <b>2</b>  | <b>0</b>  |
| 25 | I promote a system of continuous improvement and reflection in my practice.                                                                                                                                                          | <b>2</b>  | <b>0</b>  |
| 26 | In the last year, I have attended at least one professional learning session that has enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.                                                        | <b>0</b>  | <b>-1</b> |
| 27 | I don't see colour or culture in my service; my programs and practices are inclusive of all children regardless of culture.                                                                                                          | <b>1</b>  | <b>-3</b> |
| 28 | I advocate for the review of my site's philosophy statement and QIP to ensure that they incorporate principles and practices that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.                                 | <b>3</b>  | <b>0</b>  |
| 29 | Cultural competence is an off-the-shelf program adding yet another educational buzzword.                                                                                                                                             | <b>-4</b> | <b>-2</b> |
| 30 | Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in our program is too political.                                                                                                                                    | <b>-3</b> | <b>-2</b> |
| 31 | I am confident that I have reached a high level of cultural competence.                                                                                                                                                              | <b>-2</b> | <b>-1</b> |
| 32 | I understand 'culture' and its important role in education.                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>1</b>  | <b>0</b>  |

|    |                                                                                                 |          |          |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| 33 | Developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development.                  | <b>4</b> | <b>1</b> |
| 34 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are regularly included in our daily program. | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b> |

## Appendix 4 Crib Sheets

| Crib Sheet for Factor 1                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
|                                                        | Items ranked at +4                                                                                                                                                                                   |    |
| 21                                                     | It is important for educators to recognise and promote culture in developing children's sense of being, becoming and belonging.                                                                      | +4 |
| 33                                                     | Developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development.                                                                                                                       | +4 |
| Items ranked higher in Factor 1 array than in Factor 2 |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |    |
| 4                                                      | I value different culture's ways of knowing and being.                                                                                                                                               | +3 |
| 5                                                      | I understand the importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.                                                                                                | +3 |
| 6                                                      | I take responsibility for learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' culture and community.                                                                                      | +1 |
| 17                                                     | I intervene when I observe other staff engaging in behaviours that show cultural insensitivity, biases and prejudice.                                                                                | +2 |
| 24                                                     | I am aware of the differences between cultural awareness and cultural competence.                                                                                                                    | +2 |
| 25                                                     | I promote a system of continuous improvement and reflection in my practice.                                                                                                                          | +2 |
| 27                                                     | I don't see colour or culture in my service; my programs and practices are inclusive of all children regardless of culture.                                                                          | +1 |
| 28                                                     | I advocate for the review of my site's philosophy statement and QIP to ensure that they incorporate principles and practices that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence. | +3 |
| 32                                                     | I understand 'culture' and its important role in education                                                                                                                                           | +1 |
| 26                                                     | In the last year, I have attended at least one professional learning session that has enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.                        | 0  |
| Items ranked lower in Factor 1 array than in Factor 2  |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |    |
| 2**                                                    | Cultural competence is an event.                                                                                                                                                                     | -3 |
| 3**                                                    | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in my service through the use of traditional images, posters and celebrations.                                                              | -1 |
| 7                                                      | I am aware of my own worldview and how it impacts on my practice.                                                                                                                                    | +1 |
| 9                                                      | Awareness of cultural differences is the first step to becoming a culturally competent educator.                                                                                                     | +1 |
| 10**                                                   | I feel so constrained by lack of time that I struggle to meet every child's individual needs, including cultural ones.                                                                               | -2 |
| 14                                                     | My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs.                                                                                                  | 0  |
| 15                                                     | I acknowledge and value Aboriginal English as a means to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging.                                                             | 0  |

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |    |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 16                        | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's learning and use the cultural tools of the community.                                                                                                                     | -1 |
| 20                        | I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site.                                                                     | -1 |
| 22                        | I have undertaken Cultural awareness training and am happy with my current knowledge of Aboriginal cultures.                                                                                                                         | -2 |
| 23                        | I have a clear understanding of the explicit practice in the Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, "The Journey for Educators: Growing competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures". | 0  |
| 26                        | In the last year, I have attended at least one professional learning session that has enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence                                                         | 0  |
| 30                        | Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in our program is too political                                                                                                                                     | -3 |
| 31                        | I am confident that I have reached a high level of cultural competence.                                                                                                                                                              | -2 |
| <b>Items ranked at -4</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |    |
| 12                        | I wait until I am given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our program so I don't do the wrong thing                                                                                       | -4 |
| 29                        | Cultural competence is an off-the-shelf program adding yet another educational buzzword.                                                                                                                                             | -4 |

**\*\* denotes that both factors scored the same**

| <b>Crib Sheet for Factor 2</b>                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
|                                                               | <b>Items ranked at +4</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                            |           |
| <b>14</b>                                                     | My personal and professional interactions are guided by my own cultural understandings and beliefs.                                                                                                                                  | <b>+4</b> |
| <b>20</b>                                                     | I seek support from the local Aboriginal community and families to assist in service delivery to respond to the needs of Aboriginal cultures served by our site.                                                                     | <b>+4</b> |
| <b>Items ranked higher in Factor 1 array than in Factor 2</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |
| <b>1</b>                                                      | I endeavour to understand and appreciate the central values and practices of the Aboriginal children and families that access my service.                                                                                            | <b>+3</b> |
| <b>7</b>                                                      | I am aware of my own worldview and how it impacts on my practice.                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>+2</b> |
| <b>9</b>                                                      | Awareness of cultural differences is the first step to becoming a culturally competent educator.                                                                                                                                     | <b>+3</b> |
| <b>15</b>                                                     | I acknowledge and value Aboriginal English as a means to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging.                                                                                             | <b>+2</b> |
| <b>16</b>                                                     | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's learning and use the cultural tools of the community.                                                                                                                     | <b>+3</b> |
| <b>23</b>                                                     | I have a clear understanding of the explicit practice in the Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, "The Journey for Educators: Growing competence in working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures". | <b>+1</b> |
| <b>34</b>                                                     | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are regularly included in our daily program.                                                                                                                                      | <b>+1</b> |
| <b>Items ranked lower in Factor 1 array than in Factor 2</b>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |
| <b>2**</b>                                                    | Cultural competence is an event.                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>-3</b> |
| <b>3**</b>                                                    | I support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in my service through the use of traditional images, posters and celebrations.                                                                                              | <b>-1</b> |
| <b>5</b>                                                      | I understand the importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.                                                                                                                                | <b>+1</b> |
| <b>6</b>                                                      | I take responsibility for learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' culture and community.                                                                                                                      | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>18</b>                                                     | It is not necessary to specifically include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence in our sites philosophy statement as all cultures should be represented.                                                       | <b>-3</b> |
| <b>24</b>                                                     | I am aware of the differences between cultural awareness and cultural competence.                                                                                                                                                    | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>25</b>                                                     | I promote a system of continuous improvement and reflection in my practice.                                                                                                                                                          | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>26</b>                                                     | In the last year, I have attended at least one professional learning session that has enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.                                                        | <b>-1</b> |
| <b>27</b>                                                     | I don't see colour or culture in my service; my programs and practices are inclusive of all children regardless of culture.                                                                                                          | <b>-3</b> |

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>28</b>                 | I advocate for the review of my site's philosophy statement and QIP to ensure that they incorporate principles and practices that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence. | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>32</b>                 | I understand 'culture' and its important role in education.                                                                                                                                          | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>33</b>                 | Developing cultural competence is a long-term, ongoing process of development.                                                                                                                       | <b>+1</b> |
| <b>Items ranked at -4</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |
| <b>8</b>                  | While I do not believe in the practices and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, I tolerate them.                                                                              | <b>-4</b> |
| <b>12</b>                 | I wait until I am given directions about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in our program so I don't do the wrong thing.                                                      | <b>-4</b> |