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Factors enabling a successful transition to boarding school for Australian Aboriginal students

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Masters of Education (Research)

Peter James Barrett

Edith Cowan University

School of Education

2019

Declaration of original authorship

I, the undersigned author, declare to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

6th May, 2019

Peter James Barrett **Date**

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Abstract

Boarding school has been and continues to be an important stage in the educational experiences of many Aboriginal people living in remote communities in Northern Territory, Australia. The experience of moving away from family, land and community presents many challenges for students moving to boarding school and managing the dramatic transition between two vastly different cultures. This study focused on identifying the factors that help students successfully transition from a remote community to boarding school.

The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach to investigate and analyse the experiences of Aboriginal students at a regional boarding school in the Northern Territory. Critical race theory was used as a theoretical lens throughout the study design, data collection, analysis and discussion.

Quantitative enrolment data from 108 boarding students was analysed to identify aspects that correlated with a successful transition to boarding school. These findings were incorporated into two focus group discussions and one semi structured interview with students from a boarding school in Darwin, Northern Territory. The qualitative data was thematically analysed to draw themes and sub themes for further discussion.

The findings indicate that the transition from small, remote communities is highly challenging. In particular the impact of being away from family and community led to feelings of homesickness and a loss of cultural knowledge and connection to land. Students recognise in the need to return to country, family and community to maintain cultural connections which questions the often assumed benefits of boarding school. Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that parents, family and community members provide important mechanisms of support and ensure a successful transition. In particular family support helps students to deal with homesickness, provide encouragement and help maintain a connection to culture.

This thesis, provides an important addition to an emerging area of research about the important transition from Aboriginal communities to boarding school. The study focused on the experiences of students at one school in the Northern Territory and records and presents student voices and experiences undertaking the transition to boarding school. Hearing more student voices will enable all of us to gain a clearer appreciation of the impact of transitioning to boarding school for young Aboriginal people, and what can be done to improve it.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

Introduction

A review of relevant literature was conducted to investigate the key factors that enable Aboriginal students to successfully transition from remote communities to regional boarding schools in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia. This review examines the body of research relating to the successful transition of Aboriginal students from remote communities to regional boarding schools in Australia. More specifically it aims to identify, interrogate and discuss the factors contributing to academic achievement and success for Aboriginal students, the history and effectiveness of boarding school provision for Aboriginal people and the factors that contribute to a successful transition from a remote community to a regional boarding school. The literature review provides a background and introduction to the research questions.

1) What individual, family, community and school influences enable Aboriginal students to successfully transition to a boarding school in the Northern Territory and stay there?

2) What do Aboriginal students perceive to be the biggest challenges when transitioning to a boarding school from a remote community in the Northern Territory?

Overall, the literature focused on the area of Aboriginal education is subject to intense debate (Helmer et.al. 2014). This debate is prompted by a number of issues including methodological approaches taken in studies, limited meaningful involvement and partnerships with Aboriginal communities and a tendency to adopt and promote single solutions to complex multidisciplinary problems (Craven, 2006; Guenther & Bat, 2013; Helmer, Harper, Lea, Wolgemuth, & Chalkiti, 2014; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Scrimgeour, 2001). In addition there is a limited research base

specifically examining the factors that enable a successful transition from remote communities to boarding school (Benveniste, Dawson, & Rainbird, 2015; Guenther et al., 2017; Stewart, 2015b). Investigation and evaluation of a range of literature provides important contextual awareness of the issues surrounding boarding schools.

Firstly, factors that broadly contribute to academic success will be defined and interrogated. Second, the review will focus on factors that lead to positive academic outcomes for Aboriginal students. Thirdly, the review will explore factors leading to academic success in the broad areas of individual student influences, teacher and curriculum based factors and broader school, home and community aspects. Finally, the focus will turn to boarding schools, reviewing the history, changing approaches and factors leading to positive academic outcomes for Aboriginal students from remote communities.

Use and clarification of terminology

Aboriginal and Indigenous

Throughout this review the term “Aboriginal” will be used to identify First Australians. Aboriginal refers to Aboriginal people of Australia (Gower, 2012). Both terms are considered more appropriate within academic literature in reference to Australia’s original peoples as a whole (UNSW, 1996). These terms stress the humanity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are used because there is no Aboriginal word that refers to all Aboriginal people in Australia (UNSW, 1996). Within certain geographic areas Aboriginal people are referred to using respective terms such as Yolngu people from North East Arnhem land (UNSW, 1996). These terms are less applicable in this study as Aboriginal students in regional boarding schools generally represent a diverse range of language and culture groups throughout the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. The author acknowledges that a range of terms are used to address the first peoples of Australia and “Aboriginal” will be used to describe a group of people that are the focus of this study.

Remote

The Australian Bureau of Statistics divides the country into five areas; major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Remoteness in the context of this study is a geographical term that is determined by the relative access to services for communities across Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). It is also acknowledged that remote Aboriginal communities have distinct sociocultural, linguistic and epistemological difference as compared to urban Australia (Guenther & Bat, 2013). Many very remote communities have large populations of Aboriginal people. In terms of schooling, enrolment in over half of the 268 schools in very remote Australia consist of more than 80% Aboriginal students (Guenther & Bat, 2013).

Disadvantage

The word disadvantage is used to highlight the disparity in educational opportunities and subsequent achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It can be specifically defined as 'the difference (or gap) in outcomes for Indigenous Australians when compared with non- Indigenous Australians' (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2012, p. xiv). I recognize that the term disadvantage is problematized and often used to present a deficit view of Aboriginal learners. The term is used throughout this paper to acknowledge that significant broad differences exist in the lives Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia. It is acknowledged that this term is a construct of non-Aboriginal society and that Aboriginal people themselves do not necessarily view themselves as disadvantaged (Guenther, Disbray, & Osborne, 2016).

Successful transition

Defining a what constitute success in Aboriginal education is problematic. For the purpose of this study, students taking part in the focus group discussions had all been accepted into the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP). Acceptance into the program was used as the inclusion criteria for a successful transition into boarding school. The IYLP program is federally funded with the aim of identifying and supporting Aboriginal students to become leaders within their school and broader community (The Smith Family, 2014). Students were accepted into the program based on school staff references and recommendations, a written application and interviews with IYLP coordinators.

Boarding School

A *boarding school* residence provides accommodation and food for students on the same property as the other school facilities (English & Guerin, 2017a). In the Northern Territory students attend either boarding schools or residential schools. In the Northern Territory, many schools have a large proportion of Aboriginal boarding students alongside non-Aboriginal day students from Darwin. This contrasts to boarding school provision for Aboriginal students in larger cities such as Sydney and Melbourne. These schools often have a very small percentage of Aboriginal students as part of a much larger community

non-Aboriginal boarding and day students (O'Bryan, 2016). There are a range of boarding school scenarios across Australia, this thesis focuses on boarding facilities which have a large proportion of Aboriginal students from remote communities.

Some studies in this thesis also refer to a *residential college* which provides dormitory style accommodation for the students, but is located separately from the school and is therefore not necessarily affiliated (Benveniste et al., 2015; English & Guerin, 2017a).

Defining and Measuring Success

Traditional measures

It is important to define academic achievement and academic success as they commonly appear in the literature. Academic achievement is a narrow form of assessment focused on cognitive and learning gains throughout a period of time (Bunce & Hutchinson, 1993; Choi, 2005; Trueman & Hartley, 1996). In contrast, academic success is a broader concept that incorporates a broad range of educational outcomes from degree attainment to moral development (Diseth, 2007; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Lizzio, Wilson, & Simons, 2002). Academic achievement is measured largely through quantitative approaches such as grades and grade point average to compare student learning (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015). Academic achievement in educational research is helpful in providing a clear metric through which comparisons can be made (Fan & Chen, 2001). By contrast academic success arose from concerns that simple metrics do not encompass the broad range of measures that demonstrate learning (York et al., 2015).

Community perceptions of success in Aboriginal communities

Studies focusing on the views and opinions of parents and guardians from remote Aboriginal communities showed differing aspirations for their children at school from traditional definitions and metrics (Osborne & Guenther, 2013; Guenther et. al., 2014). Respondents focused on the development of positive behaviour, culture and language as important aspects of educational success. This differs from the dominant culture view which focuses on better NAPLAN scores, improved retention rates and higher education and employment (Osborn and Guenther, 2013).

The different perceptions regarding aspirations for schooling indicate that different approaches are necessary to engage, motivate and educate Aboriginal students. When examining measures of success, the underlying ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions in traditional measures for success and failure need to

be balanced with aspirations of the parents, students and communities themselves (Guenther, Milgate, O'Beirne, & Osborne, 2014).

Definition of Success in the Study

This study will use parameters including both academic achievement and other factors to identify students who have successfully transitioned to boarding school. The measurement for "success" in the context of this study will be consistent attendance, demonstrating leadership, academic achievement and strong extracurricular engagement. These elements are characteristic of a cohort of students at the school who have been accepted into the federally funded *Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP)*. This program, administered by the non-profit organisation, *The Smith Family*, identifies students with leadership potential and provides support to enable them to develop leadership skills, complete secondary school and become future leaders within their communities (The Smith Family, 2014). During the application process students undergo interviews, complete written applications and are required to have staff references from their previous school. This process is designed to provide a holistic view of the students' contributions and achievements both in class and in the broader school community. This allows students to use their experiences as role models and active community members in their application. It also allows students to access the program that may not achieve academically but show effort, commitment and application in the school community to access the program.

Factors that broadly influence academic success

Student focused factors

A number of student-focused factors such as student effort, self-efficacy and aspirations influence academic success in a secondary school setting (Bandura, 1977; Carroll et al., 2009). Student factors differ for individuals but many student based factors such as student aspirations are also linked to broader family and community influences (Sirin, 2005; White, Reynolds, Thomas, & Gitzlaff, 1993).

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance attainments including control over motivation, behaviour and the broader social environment (Bandura, 1977). A study of Australian high school students by Carroll et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between student academic performance and self-efficacy alongside negative delinquent behaviours such as physical aggression, motor theft and property offences. Positive academic and self-regulatory efficacy was found to positively influence academic achievement and decrease delinquent behaviours. This indicates that addressing and working to improve student self-efficacy and self-belief could positively influence academic outcomes and reduce the occurrence of negative behaviours.

Student retention in school is an important component of overall academic success (Lamb & Rice, 2008). One study focusing on the risk factors associated with students dropping out of school found three broad influences; discipline problems, low educational aspirations and low occupational aspirations (Rumberger, 2001). The study acknowledged that there is a complex interplay between family, school, community and peer related factors divided into broad individual and institutional that over a period of time influence the decision to drop out of school (Rumberger, 2001). Individual factors including student engagement (attitudes and behaviours) and academic achievement combine with external factors such as educational stability and background factors. Financial capital, school composition and resources

also combine to students dropping out of school. Due to this complex interplay it is important to also examine home and community influences including socio-economic status (SES) on academic success. This will be a focus in the section focused on home and community based factors.

School based factors

Several school level characteristics influence the level of academic success. These include a school climate that is peaceful, high expectations for student achievement, a school-wide emphasis on basic skills, a system of clear instructional objectives for assessing student performance and a school principal who is a strong leader and who sets high standards and creates incentives for learning (Coryn, Schröter, & McCowen, 2014; Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000; Stewart, 2008). This section focuses on literature surrounding school level factors that lead to academic achievement.

School climate was identified as an important factor in student achievement (Sellström & Bremberg, 2006; Stewart, 2008). School climate is defined as the level of cohesion and measured through factors such as the number of disruptions and how safe students feel (Stewart, 2008). Further elaboration states that a positive school climate involves whole school consensus and a shared morality that stimulates and exercises control over students' efforts to excel (Kreft, 1993).
By contrast ineffective schools are characterised by weak leadership, a lack of emphasis on the acquisition of basic skills, a disorderly climate, low or uneven expectations, and inconsistent or no monitoring of student progress (Reynolds et al., 2014). Stringfield, Datnow, and Ross (1998) described ineffectiveness in schools as being observable at school, teacher, and student levels. Students in ineffective schools were characterised as spending considerably less time per hour and day engaged in academic learning (Stringfield et al., 1998).

How easily remote Aboriginal students can access and transition to a western education system is regarded as a key impact on academic success (Beresford & Partington, 2003; Harris, 1979; Marks, Cresswell, & Ainley, 2006). Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1984) provides a cultural explanation to differences in educational outcomes. Studies found that working class students needed more persistence and ability than students from a favoured background to reach the same level of achievement (Bourdieu, 1984). This has led to a theory centred on the basis that

cultural understandings that children from high status backgrounds have are similar to those which underlie the education system leading to an advantage (Bourdieu, 1984; Stobart, 2005). Some ways in which Aboriginal students are impacted include different ways of learning (Harris, 1979; Jorgenson, 2010) culturally inappropriate curriculum content (Seddon, 2001) and fundamentally different epistemologies and ways of being (Nakata, 2010; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Alongside broader factors, such as socio-economic status, cultural influences are important to learning outcomes and much more research attention is needed to better understand the influence of culture (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

In summary, numerous school level factors have been identified as important influences on academic achievement. Some studies and approaches attempt to isolate school based factors from broader influences (Reynolds et al., 2014; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000) and others acknowledge the complexity in this field with other influences outside of school also impacting on academic achievement (Sellström & Bremberg, 2006). For many Aboriginal students from remote communities the western oriented school curriculum can be challenging when merging western and Aboriginal ways of knowing and thinking in the classroom.

Home and community based factors

Home and community based factors including available resources and parent/guardian involvement are a crucial aspect of a student's socio economic status that influence academic success (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1995). Home based factors such as parental education and resources are important (Brody et al., 1995). Community based influences include unequal power relations between the school and community (Ford, 2013). The tension between western models of education and other forms of learning can be a fundamental issue surrounding Aboriginal educational achievement (Guenther & Bat, 2013). In particular institutions, such as schools which do not celebrate or recognise other cultures and world views, can impact educational success and achievement (Ford, 2013). Multiple languages and dialects are spoken in many communities that

intimately connect Aboriginal people to their land, history, family and future (Lee, Fasoli, Ford, Stephenson, & McInerney, 2014). These home and community based issues interact to provide challenges and hurdles for many students to receive a successful school based education.

Home based factors

A meta-analysis conducted by Fan and Chen (2001) found a small to moderate and practically meaningful impact of parent or guardian involvement on student success. The main influence within this was parent or guardian aspirations and expectations. This study suggested that students from low socio economic status (SES) background are at greater risk due to a decreased level of family involvement.

In addition to the research by Fan and Chen (2001), additional research explores the relationship between home factors and academic success. A study by Jacobs and Harvey (2005) found that successful students are more likely to come from environments in which parents and guardians have high academic aspirations for their children (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005). This can be due to parents understanding the structures and expectations of a mainstream classroom and provide the support, guidance and resources to enable their children to succeed (Kim, 2015; Sirin, 2005). This can contrast with parents with limited education attainment who, despite having high aspirations, have limited knowledge and experience to help their children succeed (Davis, 2009).

Parent and guardian expectations of their child's achievement level can be another factor linked to high achievement. Multiple regression analyses based on a survey of 432 parents from "high", "medium" and "low" achieving schools found family expectations of their children's educational level was the strongest unique prediction of high achievement (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005). High achieving schools' parents reported the highest 'desired' and 'expected' levels of educational achievement for their children, significantly higher than for parents at either medium or low achieving schools (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005). The limitations to this

study include potential confusion in meaning associated with the definition of school success and whether results can be generalised to other groups (Jacobs & Harvey, 2005).

Community based factors

The socio economic status of a student has a large impact on educational outcomes (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Socio economic status (SES) is traditionally measured as a combination of parent/guardian education, parent/guardian income and parent/guardian occupation (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Duncan, Featherman, & Duncan, 1972). More recently home resources including household possessions and the availability of books, computers and educational services have been included in the assessment of SES and academic achievement (McLoyd, 1998). The impacts of SES on academic achievement are highlighted in a number of ways. Children from low SES backgrounds, including remote Aboriginal students, enter high school at lower grades, exhibit delayed letter recognition and phonological awareness and are more likely to drop out of school early than students from high SES backgrounds (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Palardy, 2008). In Australia coming from a high socioeconomic background insulates students from early school leaving, even if they are weak performers and attend a non-academic school (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013).

There is a large body of research focused on the link between SES and educational achievement (Schwab, 2012; Sirin, 2005; White, 1982; White et al., 1993). Two meta analytic reviews were conducted by White (1982) and Sirin (2005). The latter review examined 74 studies covering 6,871 schools and 101,157 students between 1990 and 2000 (Sirin, 2005). It was prompted by inconsistent relationships between SES and academic achievement due to changing social factors such as parent/guardian education levels and family composition along with the diverse ways that researchers define and operationalise SES (Sirin, 2005). Using a definition of SES that incorporates income, education and/or occupation of household heads, student achievement was found to be significantly impacted by family SES, particularly in the

case of minority students (Sirin, 2005). A key limitation in this meta-analysis is the focus on students in the U.S. schooling system. This limits the ability to draw conclusions between SES and academic achievement in other countries and contexts. The methodological complexity in calculating and quantifying the relationship between SES and achievement is also acknowledged by Sirin (2005) with results showing variance depending on the SES measurement used for analysis such as income or education status.

The impact of low SES impacts on Aboriginal students through a range of factors. At a community level, low educational achievement for Aboriginal students is linked with unemployment and long term unemployment can contribute to poor health, domestic violence, homelessness and substance misuse (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). Low education achievement has also been linked with high levels of incarceration among Aboriginal young people (O'Shea, Senadji, & Kalyuga, 2011). Broader social costs include poorer mental and physical health, higher crime rates and less engagement in active citizenship (Lamb & Rice, 2008). Many of these have broader costs to the society in the provision of services to cope with health, criminal and social issues arising from poor educational attainment.

From a theoretical perspective the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can be examined through critical race theory (CRT) which focuses on white hegemony and social practices that impact on people of colour (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ford, 2013). Focussing on institutional factors Ford (2013) cites the removal of bilingual education in remote schools, different learning styles and epistemologies along with associated health issues affecting remote Aboriginal students, such as conductive hearing loss. In a review of literature pertaining to Aboriginal child growth and development Penman (2006) notes that despite implementation of bilingual programs there is limited empirical evidence demonstrating improved educational outcomes. This position shows the important difference between western empirical approaches to measuring outcomes. Approaches that look holistically and systematically at the importance of

knowledge systems, languages and practices need to be considered equally and applied to address deeply rooted historical social and cultural impacts (Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010). The outcomes of approaches such as bilingual education seek to address long term, fundamental issues whereas measurement of changes in achievement is often driven by shorter term objectives relating to funding (Nakata, 2010).

Factors that broadly contribute to academic success for Aboriginal students

This section will interrogate research surrounding the extent of Aboriginal disadvantage and the factors contributing to this. Initially, studies in similar global settings such as Canada and New Zealand are examined. Secondly, factors contributing to educational achievement for Aboriginal students is discussed. Finally, this section will examine the theoretical and philosophical positions that underpin research and discussion surrounding Aboriginal education.

Epistemological and ontological differences that influence the schooling experience for Aboriginal Australian students

It is acknowledged that Aboriginal students from remote communities often carry different ontological and epistemological viewpoints that can create tension and conflict with western approaches to education (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009; Bunker, 2000; Nakata, 2007). Traditional knowledge is held by different members within a society and revealed to young people at different stages of their lives. This contrasts with a Western view of knowledge where everyone is entitled to know everything and individuals can own particular pieces of knowledge (Bunker, 2000). This is one contrast between Aboriginal and Western world views that can lead to the Western order of things being favoured and rarely contested (Nakata, 2007). Aboriginal students occupy this position between Aboriginal and Western thinking, attempting to reconcile differences at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007).

This is noted by Etherington (2006) that in many Aboriginal Australian communities there is a collaborative holding of knowledge where no one individual needs to know everything. Only particular people with the right to knowledge hold it. This ensures that many Aboriginal students transitioning from a remote community face tension and conflict between their own limited knowledge and worldview, based on their

culture in conflict with dominant, open, accessible Western ideologies and worldview (Nakata, 2007). With a limited knowledge base to draw upon, many Aboriginal learners can be disadvantaged when faced with dominant Western educational structures and systems.

Due to the nature of Aboriginal knowledge systems viewpoints and discourses are not pre-existing but must be created in the cultural interface. According to Nakata (2007) Aboriginal people are entangled in a contested knowledge space, often involuntarily. The tensions are physically real, which allows a more sophisticated view of tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal dualities.

Using the idea of a cultural interface Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009) provide examples from the Gamilaraay worldview and language. The word for “search”, “hunt” and “find” are the same word in the local language, indicating that there is a focus on process over direct learning pathways towards an intended outcome which dominates a western educational worldview.

The Kunwinjku people of northern Australia have a pedagogical approach to learning in which relationships are at the heart of learning (Etherington, 2006). The core component of learning is the adult-child relationships within a family. The curriculum of values, ideas, language, social skills and survival skills received from previous generations and passed down from adult to child (Etherington, 2006). This style and approach to learning is often asynchronous to Western curriculum and pedagogy which uses the knowledge and skills as the basis for learning, with the school system unable to replicate the familial relationships that underpin previous learning experiences of many remote Aboriginal students.

Theoretical basis

A number of theoretical positions have sought to explain and address the causes and solutions of Aboriginal educational disadvantage. These include social theory (Gray & Beresford, 2008) and critical race theory (Vass, 2015).

Gray and Beresford (2008) draw on social theory to highlight the complex interactions between Aboriginal people and the broader Australian society. Reasons for this complexity include a diverse population spread between urban locations, rural towns and remote areas, the degree of dispossession since colonisation and the differing impact of government policies on communities. These interactions have resulted in calls for systems based approach to deal with the complexities surrounding Aboriginal education (Guenther & Bat, 2013).

Social theory explains some of the difference in academic achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Folds, 1987; Gray & Beresford, 2008). When Aboriginal students are unable to develop positive relationships with teachers, they can develop oppositional identities to those desired by a school (Gray & Beresford, 2008). This can create a school climate in which students pressure each other not to succeed, known as a "shame job". Shame is a concept and feeling experienced by Aboriginal students that is linked to embarrassment about academic achievement and a fear of failure at school (Adermann & Campbell, 2007; Mander, 2012).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an approach that focuses on exploring the social (re)construction of race in ways that have material impacts on the lives of people. CRT draws on a range of academic disciplines to analyse, deconstruct and positively transform the relationship between race, racism and power (Ladson-Billings 2005). One of the main goals of CRT is to explore the construction of race within society with the ultimate goal of eliminating racism (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ford, 2013). Within the field of education CRT can be employed to identify and recognise the role of race and racism in education and work towards eliminating it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In particular it examines the political and legal framework that represents the ideology of "Western" interests and the impact and legacy of colonialism (Vass, 2015). In discussing the impact and influence of race, CRT focuses on the structures that enable preferential treatment of different groups throughout a society.

CRT has provided a theoretical lens in studies focusing on Aboriginal education (Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010; Rudolph, 2011). These critiques focus on institutional factors that impede Aboriginal students' education such as the implementation of short term solutions to institutional problems (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012). Through this theoretical lens researchers stress the need to recognise that Aboriginal knowledge systems, languages and practices need to be considered equally (Ford, 2013). They also stress that the complexity at the cultural interface must be acknowledged and overcome to address deeply rooted historical social and cultural impacts of colonialism (Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010).

Critical Race Theory provides a theoretical lens to analyse the data collected in both qualitative and quantitative elements of the study. Although some studies (Ford, 2013; Rudolph, 2011) have employed CRT to examine issues surrounding Aboriginal education, limitations apply as it is grounded in a different historical context. CRT arose from the experiences of African-American people and cannot always transfer into other contexts of racial inequality (Rudolph, 2011). Therefore, using CRT as a theoretical lens can be powerful if the researcher is fully aware of the strengths and limitations of the approach.

CRT is also used to explore and interrogate the underlying hegemonic structures, values and principles that exist throughout societies and institutions. In a study focused on boarding schools Benveniste, Guenther, Dawson, and King (2019) examined the cultural landscape of a residential school in South Australia. The study noted how students have to negotiate the hidden curriculum at boarding school which is reflected through the daily routines, programs and social relations formed by dominant group values, ideas and objectives (Benveniste et al., 2019). As residential staff seek to enforce rules to make the boarding house run smoothly, which risks reinforcing the hegemony of the dominant group. Through training in cultural awareness staff could gain greater awareness and develop cultural reflexivity to better respond to the challenges of students transitioning to boarding school and the dominant cultural factors which are inherently imposed on the students.

International Context relating to Aboriginal groups' academic achievement.

Aboriginal populations throughout the world experience educational disadvantage compared to non-Aboriginal students (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Klenowski, 2009; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2009; Rahman, 2010b; Wilson, 2014). The reasons and drivers behind this disadvantage involve a complex interplay between a range of factors (Mander & Fieldhouse, 2009; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Rahman, 2010b). Several similarities within these situations make it important to explore whether successful approaches from other countries have relevance in an Australian context. In particular Canada and New Zealand have minority Indigenous populations who comprise of less than five per cent of the total population along with similar political structures focused on Aboriginal affairs (Beresford & Partington, 2003; Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, & Peter, 2012; Rahman, 2010b). Identifying specific programs, approaches and interventions that impact positively on educational achievement for Aboriginal students from a range of countries and contexts is essential to improving this gap. In many cases, acknowledging factors that impact negatively on educational achievement for Aboriginal students in different contexts is also important.

Canada

Similar to the Australian context, First Nations Canadian students face a range of structural and cultural factors that contribute to educational disadvantage (Rahman, 2010a; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). Frustration, alienation and lower achievement stem from the imposition of dominant western success criteria without acknowledging local culture and traditions (Brady, 1996). Throughout most of the 20th century, Government funded, Church-run residential schools in Canada operated to forcibly remove and isolate Canadian First Nations children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures to assimilate them into the dominant Western culture (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006). Systemic problems

included inadequate curriculum and staffing, racism, prohibition against the use of Aboriginal language and maltreatment. The experience of students in residential schools resulted in risk of poor academic performance, reduced capacity to continue education after leaving the residential school, limited employment prospects, and reduced income as adults (Barnes et al., 2006). The impact of the residential schooling system is intergenerational and must be considered when examining boarding schools in Canada.

In an analysis of the literature accompanied by school case studies Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) identify several broad factors contributing to academic success for First Nations Canadian students. These include cultural teachings and material, educational personnel, resources, governance and community linkages. Analysis found that employment of First Nations Canadian teachers, and pedagogies involving students and parents directly lead to higher expectations and increased student achievement (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). The impact of teacher disposition is also highlighted with those who maintain active engagement with learners and their learning contexts experiencing success in the classroom. The depth and breadth of this study is impressive however the focus on case studies and literature reviews limit how applicable the findings are at a broader level.

Kanu (2007) also explored research on the effects of integrating First Nations Canadian perspectives into the curriculum. The study employed a mixed methods approach measuring the influence of nine First Nations cultural, pedagogical and classroom interaction patterns against academic achievement, class attendance and retention. Making classroom curriculum and structures more culturally compatible and consistent with the home cultures of students, resulted in successful outcomes for students, including better school engagement, improved self-confidence and higher cognitive skills (Kanu, 2007). This highlights how efforts to change the approaches to learning by introducing First Nations Canadian perspectives can lead to improved academic achievement.

New Zealand

New Zealand's Maori population have historically experienced similar educational disadvantage to Aboriginal people in Australia (Bishop et al., 2012; Rahman, 2010a). Western educational systems regarded Maori traditional knowledge and cultural practices as inferior to the dominant European culture and sought to assimilate students into the dominant culture (Bishop et al., 2012).

An approach adopted in New Zealand called the *Te Kotahitanga* professional development program uses culturally responsive pedagogy (Bishop et al., 2012). The program seeks to provide meaning, context and a familiar frame of reference for students using the experiences and perspectives of students from their own diverse cultures. An evaluation of the *Te Kotahitanga* program by (Hynds et al., 2016) examined student outcomes. The evaluation found that teacher professional development programs for culturally responsive pedagogy can shift beliefs and practices for Maori students and improved their learning outcomes. The research cautions that racism, a lack of inter cultural knowledge and poor teaching practices remain a larger issue despite these gains and larger power imbalances between the dominant education system and minority groups still needs to be addressed (Hynds et al., 2016).

Australian context relating to Aboriginal groups' academic achievement

The difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal achievement is alarming in its magnitude (Armstrong & Buckley, 2011; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Rahman, 2010b). By the age of 10 years Aboriginal students are on average two years behind national benchmark standards for literacy and numeracy (Bradley, Draca, Green, & Leeves, 2007). This impacts on post-secondary school qualifications such as degrees, diplomas and certificates. In 2008, 34 per cent of Aboriginal 20–64 year olds obtained a post school qualification, compared with 58 per cent of non-Aboriginal 20–64 year olds (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service

Provision, 2011). This gap is greater for Aboriginal students from very remote locations and widens as the length of time in the school system increases (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; Wilson, 2014). These results and standards are largely a reflection of western frames of reference to measure success that shape Australian curriculum and assessment (Maxwell, 2014). Using western frames of reference normalises this process and undermines acknowledgement of the learning that Aboriginal students bring to the classroom (Guenther & Bat, 2013). This can reinforces the deficit approach surrounding discourse in Aboriginal education. This section will review more broadly the impacts on Aboriginal students' school achievement at a national level considering the unique challenges in ensuring equal outcomes.

Quantitative Studies

A number of studies have investigated the factors contributing to academic achievement and success for Aboriginal students (Biddle & Cameron, 2012; Dandy, Durkin, Barber, & Houghton, 2015; Eltchelebi, 1999; McInerney, 1994; Purdie & Buckley, 2010b; Whitley, 2014). Across all groups several broad themes emerge as key factors for success. Some studies employ quantitative approaches to examine factors impacting on educational achievement (Biddle & Cameron, 2012; Zubrick & Silburn, 2006). Common factors shown throughout studies include the impact of English as an Additional Language (EAL) on academic performance along with racism and broader systemic barriers (Tripcony, 2002).

Data from the MySchool website was used by Ladwig and Luke (2014) to examine the relationships between attendance and achievement for Aboriginal Australian students. The study concluded that schools with higher attendance rates did not result in higher achievement levels with similar schools . The findings question assumption that students not attending schools is a chief reason for poor performance. The focus of narratives such as poor attendance reinforce the deficit discourse which surrounds Aboriginal students, families and communities (Guenther

& Bat, 2013). This focus can fail to recognise and respond to systemic problems and racism which are impacting the educational experience of Aboriginal students

Datasets were used by Biddle and Cameron (2012) to identify key factors that impact on Aboriginal educational participation in Australia. The study found that early childhood education, parent or carer experiences of discrimination at school along with geographic remoteness negatively influence academic achievement (Biddle & Cameron, 2012). This shows that broader social elements, including discrimination, have an impact on Aboriginal academic achievement along with student centred and geographical factors. Another key finding in this study relates to expectations, Aboriginal students are less likely to expect to undertake post school education, even when other metrics show the academic capability to do so (Biddle & Cameron, 2012).

Another quantitative study by Zubrick and Silburn (2006) focused on factors influencing school attendance for Aboriginal students. Fifteen factors were found to be associated with poor school attendance. These included age, language spoken in the school (Aboriginal language or Aboriginal English), background in day care, sufficiency of sleep, academic performance, risk of emotional difficulties, the carer's relationship with school or principal or both, employment status of the carer, home ownership, frequency of reading to the child at home, number of life stress events, proportion of Aboriginal students in the school, presence in the school of an Aboriginal education officer and the socio-economic status of the school. The factors identified in this study cover a range of individual, family and community influences and highlight the complexity of identifying and addressing the causes and drivers influencing Aboriginal education.

Qualitative Studies and Reviews

Qualitative studies focused on students, teachers and other stakeholders have been used to identify key themes relating to academic success for Aboriginal students. Some studies focus exclusively on Australian based research (e.g. Rahman, 2010) and

others examine factors and relationships between a number of groups including students of Aboriginal, Asian and Anglo descent (Ball & Lamb, 2001; Dandy et al., 2015).

Nationally, a review conducted by Helme and Lamb (2011) outlined a range of measures that help improve Aboriginal achievement in school. These include a shared vision, high expectations for success, community involvement in planning, vocational education and training (VET) options, school engagement programs and individual case management for students (Helme & Lamb, 2011). The review also notes that short term "one size fits all" approaches do not work along with interventions that have limited community involvement (Helme & Lamb, 2011). It is effective as a broad overview but the lack of peer reviewed, primary research limits the applicability of the outcomes to other areas.

A qualitative study by Malin and Maidment (2003) focused on factors identified by Aboriginal parents from remote communities contributing to positive educational outcomes. The main positive contributor identified by parents was an Aboriginal teacher in schools. Employing community based Aboriginal teachers can more effectively meet the cultural and social needs of students (Malin & Maidment, 2003). Factors that negatively impact on achievement include insufficient cultural awareness and high turnover for non-Aboriginal teachers, limited family input into curriculum and concerns over teasing and fighting amongst students from different language and dialect groups at school (Malin & Maidment, 2003). Interviews with students revealed that teachers spoke too fast, used unfamiliar words and did not explain concepts and tasks with sufficient clarity (Malin & Maidment, 2003).

Klenowski (2009) focuses on the impact of standardised assessment as the key measure of learning for Aboriginal students. The article views underachievement in assessment as a socio cultural issue rather than a technical issue measured through standardised national and international assessments. Language is emphasised as a key factor that directly impacts long term literacy and numeracy achievement as many students from remote areas speak one or more languages other than Standard

Australian English (Klenowski, 2009). For Aboriginal people the local language is central to cultural transmission particularly in remote areas facilitating personal, social, cultural and spiritual connections. Because language is closely connected to culture, differences in test scores between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are related more to cultural factors than the technical process of language acquisition traditionally employed by teachers (Klenowski, 2009). These insights indicate the need for more culturally responsive teaching practices for Aboriginal language learners at school to provide support when learning Standard Australian English.

A number of factors relating to achievement and equity within the education system for Aboriginal people have been identified (Gray & Beresford, 2008). The paper argues that a complex set of underlying factors contribute to the difference in achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Factors contributing to this include broad measures such as, coordination between government departments and a lack of shared vision, commitment and accountability from government. At a smaller scale influences such as poorly perceived strategies, overlap between federal and state government responsibilities, geographic isolation and teacher training also impact on achievement. As a policy paper the discussion is broad and based solely on secondary data. However, acknowledging the complexity of the issue and framing structural responses based on equity reflects other literature (Guenther & Bat, 2013).

Mixed Methods Studies

Mixed methods is an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches within the research process to gain a better understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). A mixed methods study by Rahman (2010b) focuses on factors impacting on Aboriginal student success in secondary school. The study combined quantitative student survey results and 36 qualitative student interviews that were analysed through the framework theory of culturally responsive schooling. The basis of this theory is that schools are culturally respectful, inclusive

and incorporate the home backgrounds of students to enhance the learning and educational outcomes (Bishop et al., 2012; Rahman, 2010b). This also includes a contextualised curriculum with links between Western and Aboriginal knowledge systems to appeal to Aboriginal learners (Rahman, 2010b). This approach has been implemented in New Zealand with Maori students under the *Te Kotahitanga* project that identified a connection with between positive cultural identity within a school and corresponding student success (Bishop et al., 2012). This approach is grounded in improving staff awareness, knowledge and respect for the fact that ethnically groups have different values or express similar values in different ways (Beresford & Gray, 2006; Bevan-Brown, 2005). This knowledge can consequently be used to design culturally responsive curriculum and teaching strategies.

Factors contributing to successful transition to boarding school in Australia

Boarding schools have been a feature of the Australian educational landscape for remote Aboriginal students for over a century (Mander, 2012). This section will look briefly at the history of boarding school provision for Aboriginal people before exploring relevant literature and commentary on factors that lead to a successful transition from remote communities. The section covers literature and evidence from across Australia, but particularly focuses on the Northern Territory where possible.

Background to Aboriginal educational achievement

Geographical factors

Aboriginal people in Australia, and particularly in the Northern Territory are among the most severely disadvantaged minority groups in the developed world (Bradley et al., 2007; Wilson, 2014). This disadvantage increases with remoteness (Wilson, 2014). Remoteness in the context of this study is a geographical term relating to the relative access to services for communities across Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The Australian Bureau of Statistics divides the country into five areas; major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The Northern Territory has the largest percentage of remote Aboriginal people and the low population density of 0.17 people per km^2 making service delivery logistically and economically challenging (Wilson, 2014). Remote Aboriginal students come from communities that have lower median income, more densely populated houses and low employment levels compared to non-Aboriginal people (Helme & Lamb, 2011; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; Wilson, 2014; Yeung, Craven, & Ali, 2013). Issues such as densely populated houses lead to a range impacts in terms of health and nutrition that impact on educational achievement (Lyons & Janca, 2012). Communication is also a barrier with small outstations and communities in

the Northern Territory do not have reliable mobile phone reception or landline phones in households (Taylor, 2012).

Some caution is warranted to the term remote which assumes these communities are inherently disadvantaged, deficient or failing. Descriptions provided by a selection of schools in a study by Guenther, Halsey, and Osborne (2015) conversely found that remote schools did not describe themselves in language that implied deficiency and disadvantaged. The constructs of remoteness categories are important for governance and the allocation of services, but the assumption of disadvantage can derive from an outsiders perspective and not necessarily that of people living in the community itself.

There are considerable challenges in delivering services to a small population spread across such a large geographical area (Helmer et al., 2014). Short term interventions, a one size fits all approach and failure to address underlying causes, have all been identified as strategies that fail to have an impact on Aboriginal educational achievement (Helme & Lamb, 2011). Other factors include normalised disadvantage that is a legacy of colonialism, a deficit viewpoint, policies focused on assimilation and a range of complex social factors underlying issues such as engagement and retention rate (Gray & Beresford, 2008).

Historical Factors

A history of racist educational policies, programmes and attitudes within Australia have negatively impacted on Aboriginal people and their identities and epistemologies (Beresford et al., 2012; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2013). Since European arrival and colonisation the policies and practices surrounding boarding school has led to significant intergenerational trauma and issues (Malin & Maidment, 2003). Throughout most of the twentieth century limited or no education was provided to Aboriginal people, in the 1940s it was estimated that fewer than 10 per cent of Aboriginal children attended any school (Gray & Beresford, 2008). The removal of children from families during the twentieth century intended to provide

mainstream thinking and living instilled into their worldviews resulted in lost links to language and culture that still affects students in the present day (Benveniste et al., 2015). Assimilation was a focus in the 1960's as Aboriginal people were required to learn and adopt white Australian values, knowledge and culture with little to no acknowledgement of local beliefs, knowledge and language (Benveniste et al., 2015; Beresford & Partington, 2003; Klenowski, 2009).

Recent efforts and approaches to Aboriginal Education have focussed on "closing the gap" between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students framed through government efforts. The Melbourne Declaration sets out broad educational goals for all state and territory governments with the aim of ensuring high quality education for all young Australians (Ministerial Council for Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). The commitment to action covers a number of areas focused on equity, excellence to ensure that young Australians are creative, confident, active and informed citizens. The declaration notes that Aboriginal students are behind other students in terms of enrolment, attendance, participation, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion (Ministerial Council for Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). Although ambitious and well meaning, efforts such as the Melbourne declaration represent beliefs and practices focused on disadvantage and "closing the gap" highlight the dominant western epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies within the area of Aboriginal education. Criticism offered by Klenowski (2009) includes segregation through the creation of "special classes" for underachievers, and the use of culturally biased intelligence tests to reinforce low educational achievement. Furthermore it is argued that the dominant view on education and achievement is largely a western construct derived from European view on what constitutes learning and success to the detriment of Aboriginal learners (Klenowski, 2009). The dominant western approach to education contrasts to Aboriginal peoples approaches which are considered as an inclusive, social process in which children acquire knowledge through family and community members (Klenowski, 2009; Mander, 2012).

Consequences of Low Educational Achievement

The consequences of low educational achievement for Aboriginal students provide compelling evidence to examine factors which lead to successful schooling. Consequences affect individuals, families and broader communities, which can be more pronounced in smaller remote communities. At an individual level adolescent students who struggle to develop literacy skills have impacts such as lower self-esteem and feelings of competence (Hartry, Fitzgerald, & Porter, 2008). Aboriginal boarding school students can also experience higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress compared to non-Aboriginal peers (Mander, Cohen, & Pooley, 2015a). Evidence from Western Australia notes that Aboriginal people experience lower life expectancy and lower health outcomes (Lyons & Janca, 2012; Mander, 2012). The rate of suicide is also significantly higher amongst Aboriginal people, 30.8 people per 100,000 people in the Northern Territory (Wilson, 2014). This is almost double the rate of 16.4 people per 100,000 for non-Aboriginal people and 10.3 for non-Aboriginal people across the nation (Wilson, 2014). These broader societal issues are not solely determined by low educational achievement but involve the interplay of several mutually reinforcing factors that impact on the educational experience and outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal adults in the Northern Territory also have lower employment levels and a lower median personal weekly income than non-Aboriginal adults (Wilson, 2014). There are links between truancy and non-completion of high school and criminal activity (Purdie & Buckley, 2010a). This results in a disproportionate amount of Aboriginal people in the prison system in the NT (Wilson, 2014). Aboriginal people comprise of 3% of the total population, while the nation's prison system contains of 26% Aboriginal inmates (Wilson, 2014). This is even more pronounced in the Northern Territory, where Aboriginal people comprised 84% of the adult prisoner population in 2017 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). This was the largest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners of any state or territory.

The consequences of low educational achievement can be compounded in future generations. Aboriginal children who have a parent who is employed are more likely to attend and complete school (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). These disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory is not solely the consequence of educational attainment and achievement. There are a number of complex factors involved, particularly the role of race and covert discrimination (Vass, 2015). However a lack of success within the current educational system can lead to a range of negative outcomes.

Characteristics of boarding school

There is an emerging body of research in the effectiveness and success of transitioning from remote Aboriginal communities to regional boarding schools (Benveniste et al., 2015; Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016; Mander, 2012; O'Bryan, 2016; Stewart, 2015b). Emerging evidence indicates that the transition process is "highly problematic for an unacceptably high number of students from remote Aboriginal communities" in the absence of quality data and research (Stewart, 2015b, p. 13).

Approximately 5200 Aboriginal students attended boarding school with government support across the country (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b). The primary funding mechanism used by the Federal Government to support Aboriginal students and families transitioning from remote communities to boarding school is called ABSTUDY (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b). In 2014, ABSTUDY benefits were paid for almost 4,300 students across 200 boarding schools in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017a). This increased to 5,700 payments for secondary aged students in 2015, with 21% of students coming from the Northern Territory (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b). This data excludes students who attend boarding schools through direct support from family or other means (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b; Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016). The lack of

clear figures regarding the number of Aboriginal students attending boarding school makes it challenging to plan for boarding school provision at a broader level.

Estimations derived from publicly available census and MySchool data by Guenther, Milgate, et al. (2016) found that approximately 1,500 school young people between the ages of 12-17 are not engaged in any form of school. If all of these children attended school the boarding facilities across the Northern Territory would be overwhelmed. The strict entry requirements for academic performance and behaviour may exclude these disengaged students attending boarding school interstate (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017a). The underlying assumption within this is that the fundamental privilege and right to an education is not available to all students in the Northern Territory (Guenther et al., 2017). This highlights the importance of accurate data and reporting to ensure that all Aboriginal students living in remote communities throughout the Northern Territory have access to a quality secondary education.

Factors impacting Aboriginal students transitioning to boarding school

Some studies have looked at movement from a qualitative perspective examining the views of students, parents and caregivers along with school staff (Mander, 2012; Mander et al., 2015a; Stewart, 2015b). The impact on the transition process from remote communities to boarding school include: a loss of connection to culture (Mander, 2012; Purdie & Buckley, 2010a), homesickness, loss of family support (Purdie & Buckley, 2010a), a sense of shame and alienation (Duncan, 1990; McCoy, 2011; Purdie & Buckley, 2010a) a lack of school readiness (Mander, 2012), and inappropriate levels of resources to meet additional needs. Even within the limited literature and Government policies, a common feature noted is a deficit view on the transition process, focussing on the barriers and issues rather than the factors that lead to a successful transition (Stewart, 2015b). This section will examine the factors

mentioned above in more detail along with suggested approaches and factors that can lead to a successful transition.

Impact on Culture and identity

A major factor influencing the successful transition from a remote community to boarding school is the impact on culture and identity. A number of studies have found a strong connection between racial identity and health and wellbeing of young Aboriginal people throughout the world (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, Hallett, & Marcia, 2003; Kickett-Tucker, 2009). Many communities speak multiple languages and dialects that intimately connect Aboriginal people to their land, history, family and future (Lee et al., 2014).

The culture shock resulting from moving between cultures is well described in a range of literature (Mander, 2012; Trudgen, 2012; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). In Australia culture shock has been described as discovering and negotiating different ways of being, knowing and doing when entering another cultural domain (Trudgen, 2012). Transitioning to boarding school for remote Aboriginal students can result in a dislocation from customary practices and a sense of loss from missing out on opportunities to learn and progress cultural knowledge. Having a strong foundation in both culture and language is acknowledged as fundamental to helping students "walk in two worlds" between Aboriginal culture and belief systems and Western cultural norms (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b). Challenges remain for schools to create spaces within classrooms and boarding houses that allow Aboriginal students to explore, promote and reinforce their identity alongside their formal education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b; Mander, 2012).

Homesickness and family support

Homesickness and family support are prominent factors impacting upon remote Aboriginal students in boarding school. Homesickness involves anxiety, distress and functional impairment resulting from the actual or anticipated separation from

home or caregivers (Mander, 2012, p. 27). During interviews conducted by Mander (2012) students had a range of experiences in terms of duration, frequency and intensity. Strategies to help deal with homesickness included daily routines, keeping busy and talking to friends and family while having another student from the same family or community helped to cope with homesickness (Mander, 2012). Students also used both countrymen to help understand the structure and routines that of boarding school and cope with homesickness (Benveniste et al., 2015; O'Bryan, 2016). Staff interviews noted that students entering boarding school at a younger age had an easier transition experience (Mander, 2012).

Other studies have found homesickness to be a challenge when transitioning to boarding school (Benveniste et al., 2015; Bobongie, 2017a; O'Bryan, 2016). Students reported crying and isolating themselves and was triggered by seeing family members, distance from home, excessive noise in the boarding house and the loss of family members (English & Guerin, 2017b). In addition to this student interviews conducted English and Guerin (2017b) attributed some conflict in the boarding house to homesick students. Homesick students intentionally caused fights to be sent home back to their community. This highlights the both the underlying causes of homesickness and its effects.

Some studies have also focused stressed the importance of boarding staff training and understanding to improve their capacity to address and improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal students (Benveniste et al., 2019; Heyeres et al., 2018). Viewing through the lens of critical race theory, Benveniste et al. (2019) advocates for staff training focusing on critical reflexive practice so that staff are more aware of the broader cultural landscape which influence student behaviour and experiences in the boarding house. A Queensland based study by Heyeres et al. (2018) used the participatory action research approach to examine the efficacy and impact of a multicomponent training program for boarding staff. The program showed improved staff attitudes to mental health and skills to improve student wellbeing. One outcome of the training shift in the case management approach to focus on building

resilience in students. Continued training for boarding staff can aid and reduce homesickness as boarding staff have a wider range of skills to assist with student wellbeing.

Importance of Relationships

Family members have been cited as important to reducing the impacts of homesickness for remote Aboriginal students (Hunter, 2015; Stewart, 2015a). In regional boarding schools with Aboriginal students from a range of communities and language groups older family members acting as role models and mentors have been found to significantly increase the successful transition to boarding school for younger students (Mander, 2012). A study on an education program in Central Australia by Malin and Maidment (2003) similarly found that the attendance of older family members entices younger students to attend school. Interviews with Principals and school leadership through the *What Works* (2008) study found that having a number of students from a single community reduced the amount of homesickness and absenteeism among Aboriginal boarding students.

An early study of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students at a school in Darwin, NT focused on cooperative and competitive behaviour observed in a problem solving task (Benveniste et al., 2015; Sommerlad & Bellingham, 1972). Aboriginal students were found to offer more encouragement and support during problem solving trials along with deliberately seeking to share responsibility and take turns in participating (Sommerlad & Bellingham, 1972). Limitations of this study include the limited number of study participants and that it did not delineate whether participating students were remote, regional or urban based.

A study by Nelson and Hay (2010) showed that positive relationships with school staff and teachers significantly improved the transition experience. Recommended school level strategies to ensure a successful transition included acknowledging and being inclusive of a student's socially complex life world and valuing the cultural capital and life experiences that students bring to a school (Nelson & Hay, 2010).

One limitation within this study is the focus on urban Aboriginal students moving between schools in an urban environment. The large cultural, linguistic and social divide between Aboriginal students from remote communities is very different to urban Aboriginal students shifting to an urban school. Therefore the applicability to remote Aboriginal students is helpful but limited.

A doctoral thesis by O'Bryan (2016) examined the boarding experience for a range of students across Australia. Focusing on relationships her findings indicated that the parent-student relationship strongly influenced the success in guiding students through the transition to boarding school (O'Bryan, 2016). In contrast she also notes the importance of boarding school staff and support systems for students who have no one in the family or community who can proactively partner with the school. In this case the school and relationships formed with school staff can have positive outcomes. Whether the students finished school or not many interviewees responded that boarding school reshaped their future and equipped them to realise their dreams despite limited family support (O'Bryan, 2016).

Racism, sense of shame and alienation

Several studies have noted the prevalence of various forms of racism experienced by Aboriginal students (Mander, 2012; Mander, Cohen, & Pooley, 2015b; Moodie, Maxwell, & Rudolph, 2019). Racism can be identified as inter-personal; institutional; and internalized (O'Bryan, 2016).

Interpersonal racism involves prejudice and discrimination. Instances in a study by O'Bryan (2016) were often qualified citing ignorance rather than malice in racist jokes and comments made by other students and school staff. On a broader institutional level many experiences of racism in a school context with a covert nature can result in Aboriginal students feeling different at school. This can create an assumption of inferiority in students which becomes ingrained and more onerous over time (O'Bryan, 2016). Internalised racism is a result of ingrained references to

deficit stereotypes which are unrecognised and often reinforced by school programs (O'Bryan, 2016).

Some schools enact policies to highlight and reduce racism within schools such as zero tolerance and restorative justice practices (O'Bryan, 2016). However much more common place is teachers and schools attributing problems at school to students' home lives and tend not to implement pro-active anti-racism strategies or critically reflect on their own assumptions (Moodie et al., 2019). The effects of racism on students are profound. They can include school withdrawal, deidentifying as Aboriginal and internalising negative beliefs (Moodie et al., 2019). Racism within a school context operates on a number of levels with impacts on a personal, institutional and societal level.

The transition to boarding school from a remote community can lead to a sense of shame and alienation that impacts on academic success (Malin & Maidment, 2003). Shame experienced by Aboriginal students is linked to embarrassment about academic achievement and a fear of failure at school (Adermann & Campbell, 2007; Mander, 2012). Factors leading to this include perceptions held by school staff and the broader community in which Aboriginal students are viewed as less capable with lower academic expectations placed upon them (Mander, 2012). The alienation experienced when moving to boarding school results from students having to put aside their cultural identity and true sense of self in boarding schools, undermining a their sense of self (Mander et al., 2015b). The lack of cultural relevance, or even cultural misrepresentation often leads to active disengagement from students (O'Bryan, 2015, 2016).

Drawing from interviews of remote Aboriginal students in boarding schools Mander (2012) moved beyond descriptions of shame identifying negative self-concept, disconnectedness, despondency and hopelessness among interviewees. Shame is a feeling derived from the negative experiences when encountering a confronting and confusing school environment (Schwab, 2012). The impact of shame can be reduced through staff who understand the cultural and family issues of Aboriginal students to

form strong relationships with individuals, families and communities (Walker, 2019). These findings emphasise how a sense of shame can lead to students being reluctant to engage academic tasks and risk disengaging from the school system as a whole. It is important for school staff and broader systems to be aware of cultural differences and the associated challenges that Aboriginal students can experience at boarding school.

Academic expectations and literacy and numeracy demands

The lower achievement in the domains of literacy and numeracy of remote Aboriginal students is well established (Mander, 2012; Purdie, Reid, Frigo, Stone, & Kleinhenz, 2011; Purdie & Stone, 2005; Yeung et al., 2013; Zubrick & Silburn, 2006). Adjusting to different academic expectations in a boarding school is cited as a major issue for many students (Helme & Lamb, 2011; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; Wilson, 2014). In a study of the experience of transition for Aboriginal students Mander (2012) noted a majority of students that were interviewed perceived themselves as inadequately prepared for the quantity of work and the knowledge and skills expected in boarding school. Students also expressed sentiments such as “I really don’t understand it much” and “it’s like starting from scratch because I haven’t learnt some of the stuff” (Mander, 2012 p.163).

Summary

The extent of the educational disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal students and the resulting gap in academic achievement is well documented (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Klenowski, 2009; O'Shea et al., 2011; Scrimgeour, 2001; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; Wilson, 2014; Yeung et al., 2013). The literature also acknowledges the complex social, historical and cultural drivers contributing to this (Beresford et al., 2012; Biddle & Cameron, 2012; Mellor & Corrigan, 2003). More recent publications show a clearer picture of the exact number of students attending and the patterns of attendance (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b)

There is a limited but rapidly growing amount of research specifically relating to Aboriginal students and their experiences transitioning to boarding school (Benveniste et al., 2015; Benveniste et al., 2019; Guenther et al., 2017; Mander, 2012; Stewart, 2015b). Current studies have mainly been qualitative and focused on boarding and academic staff more than students (Mander, 2012). The transition experience for young males was comprehensively examined by Mander (2012) and qualitative studies focussing on past and present Aboriginal boarding students from a range of states and territories (Benveniste et al., 2019; O'Bryan, 2016). The literature has focussed on other aspects of Aboriginal students boarding school experience with both Mander (Mander et al., 2015b) and (Benveniste et al., 2015) surrounding the perceptions and attitudes of boarding school staff. Pedagogical approaches such as culturally responsive schooling have been found to improve engagement, achievement and self-concept (Bishop et al., 2012). However the effectiveness of these approaches lies with the ability and understanding of the teacher to engage students, build relationships and understand other cultures.

A review of Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory by (Wilson, 2014) recommended increasing the number remote Aboriginal students attending boarding school. This recommendation is justified mainly by the low level of achievement remote Aboriginal students as measured in NAPLAN and PISA testing

(Wilson, 2014). Following the review new policies have been introduced to increase boarding school provision for students from remote areas. These changes are occurring despite the lack of research underpinning what contributes to successful transition from remote communities to boarding school (Stewart, 2015b). In addition, there is limited data on the employment status and livelihood outcomes for remote Aboriginal students that have successfully completed school at a boarding facility. Therefore it is important to increase the evidence base on how students successfully transition from remote communities to boarding school. Student voices are largely absent in the literature and it is necessary to have a greater understanding of the challenges they face and how individual students regard the crucial factors to their success.

Gaps in the literature and areas for further study

A growing number of studies focus on the experience of students transitioning from a remote community to boarding school. The broader literature identifies factors that influence student achievement revolve around the themes of individual student characteristics, school based influences and broader social and community impacts.

The studies focussing on this often form part of a doctoral thesis with relatively small case studies which are confined to a particular state or geographical area such as Western Australia (Mander, 2012), South Australia (Benveniste, 2018) and northern Queensland (Stewart, 2015b). An exception is O'Bryan (2016) who interviewed a large cross section of students, parents and other stakeholders from across Australia. Studies are emerging which look at the transition experience and factors leading to success throughout Australia and specifically focused on the Northern Territory (Benveniste et al., 2019; Bobongie, 2017b; Guenther, Disbray, & Osborne, 2015; Osborne, Rigney, Benveniste, Guenther, & Disbray, 2018; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2017).

A number of gaps exist in the literature to improve our knowledge of how remote Aboriginal students experience the transition to boarding school and what factors

have contributed to their success. Firstly, there are no studies recording the students' experience of transition in the Northern Territory. Some studies have considered the voices of academic staff and boarding staff (Benveniste et al., 2015; Mander et al., 2015a; What Works, 2008) however there is a lack of literature on the attributes, attitudes and voice from students who have experienced success in transitioning from a remote community to boarding school. There is also a lack of quantitative studies to identify factors that can contribute to a successful transition from remote community to boarding school. Further investigation into these areas can help on a number of levels. They can provide students the chance to share their experiences and provide valuable insights. Academic and boarding staff will also gain insight into how students are faring and adjust their practice accordingly. The findings can be used by policy makers to help design programs and policies to enable remote Aboriginal students to successfully transition to boarding school whilst limiting the negative impacts on their cultural identity, language and family ties.

Chapter 2 Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodological approach taken in this exploratory study and the theoretical framework underpinning it. Critical Race Theory is presented as the theoretical framework used in the study. First, an outline of the theory and how it applies to the study design, data collection, analysis and discussion is presented. Second, the rationale for the mixed methods approach is presented along with details regarding the data collection process. Ethical considerations, including ethics approval from Edith Cowan University are provided at the end of the chapter.

Theoretical framework

In this study, critical race theory (CRT) provided a theoretical lens to view the issue of Aboriginal students from remote communities in the Northern Territory moving to boarding school. CRT allowed the researcher to unpack ideas, opinions and practices around the issue of race within the study. This approach was chosen primarily because it promotes the positive examination of empowerment and success for Indigenous students. This contrasts with the prominent “deficit” approach that focuses on the gap in achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Mander, 2012). The deficit discourse frames poor academic outcomes for Aboriginal students as faults inherent within Aboriginal people, rather than a consequence of entrenched racism and ethnocentrism within the education system (Beresford & Partington, 2003; Mander, 2012). Deficit discourse is entwined and represented throughout social landscapes along with government policy both within and outside of Aboriginal Australia (Fforde, Bamblett, Lovett, Gorringe, & Fogarty, 2013).

This section provides some background to CRT and discusses the relevance of the approach in the context of this study, identifies limitations and explores similar studies employing this theoretical perspective.

Critical Race Theory

Background

CRT draws on a range of academic disciplines to analyse, deconstruct and positively transform the relationship between race, racism and power (Ladson-Billings 2005). One of the main goals of critical race theory (CRT) is to eliminate racism throughout society (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ford, 2013). CRT examines race and racism through the social and historical structures which shape how we see the world, rather than referring to race in a biological sense (Benveniste et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While racism exists at an individual level, CRT examines these interactions at a broader level, arguing that race is a social and historical construction, shaped throughout time to influence how people relate to one another according to their background (Benveniste et al., 2019). Instead of being about interactions between individuals, CRT sees racism embedded in historical differences that are embedded within cultural and social structures.

CRT is underpinned by four basic tenets. Firstly, a fundamental aspect of CRT is that race and racism are central to defining and explaining how society functions (Yosso, 2005). Second, CRT challenges the dominant ideology by refuting claims that researchers, schools and other institutions are objective and colour blind when dealing with issues surrounding race and education. Third, CRT is cross disciplinary by nature; acknowledging the complexity of different forms of oppression and focusing solely on one area and discipline can hide other forms of exclusion (Rudolph, 2011). Finally, CRT is committed to social justice and achieving social transformation and empowerment of people oppressed due to race, gender and class (Larkin, 2016).

Within the field of education CRT seeks to identify and recognize the role of race and racism in education and highlight areas in which the practices of educational institutions fail to match their stated aims and rhetoric (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The approach has provided a theoretical lens in studies focusing on Aboriginal education (Benveniste et al., 2019; Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010; Rudolph, 2011). These critiques focus on institutional factors that impede Aboriginal students' education such as the implementation of short term solutions to institutional problems (Beresford et al., 2012). Through this theoretical lens researchers stress the need to recognise that Aboriginal knowledge systems, languages and practices need to be considered equally (Ford, 2013). They also stress that the complexity at the cultural interface must be acknowledged and overcome to address deeply rooted historical social and cultural impacts of colonialism (Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010).

Ontological and Epistemological Basis

The ontological basis of CRT is that reality is observable and shaped by a number of social, political, cultural, ethnic, economic, sexuality and gender based forces which are assumed to be natural or real (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT challenges the notion that these structures are unchangeable and seeks to challenge and break them down. The epistemological basis of CRT is that we cannot remove ourselves from what we know and this subjectivity affects our inquiry. The interaction between the researcher and the group or object between studied impacts on reality. This epistemological viewpoint is demonstrated through the interdisciplinary, cross sectional nature of CRT that complements the notion that there are multiple knowledges held by Indigenous people (Larkin, 2016). Providing authentic voice to oppressed groups and individuals through the research process can contribute to breaking down the dominant structures and institutions within a society.

Application to previous studies

CRT has provided a theoretical lens in studies focusing on Aboriginal education (Benveniste et al., 2019; Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010; Rudolph, 2011). These criticisms

focus on institutional factors that impede Aboriginal students' education such as the implementation of short term solutions to institutional problems (Beresford et al., 2012). Through this theoretical lens, researchers stress the need to recognise that Indigenous knowledge systems, languages and practices need to be considered equally (Ford, 2013). They also stress that the complexity at the cultural interface must be acknowledged and overcome to address deeply rooted historical social and cultural impacts of colonialism (Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010).

Educational approaches in cross cultural settings seek to incorporate Aboriginal pedagogies, language and ways of knowing into classroom practice to acknowledge and celebrate local culture (Ford, 2013). These practices are subject to debate in terms of outcomes and effectiveness (Ford, 2013; Nakata, 2010). The incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into Western knowledge systems is discussed by Nakata (2003) in the context of Australian university courses. Through his analysis, Nakata (2003) argues that creating courses in which Indigenous knowledge systems are separate entities to Western systems reinforces the place of Aboriginal people as the "other". This can strengthen the forces that have marginalised Aboriginal people historically. As an alternative, concentrating on the complex middle ground between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems is advocated to move forward (Nakata, 2010).

Similarly, Ford (2013) highlights the unequal nature of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems through an examination of education policies with CRT. Through a CRT perspective Ford (2013) echoes Nakata (2010) in advocating for a positive middle ground in which both knowledge systems are understood and acknowledged within the Australian school system. Despite the use of CRT to highlight underlying causes of inequality a limitation of this paper is the narrow discussion on further steps needed to address the middle ground between Western and Aboriginal knowledge systems.

A recent study by Benveniste et al. (2019) surrounds the relationships between staff, students and families at a residential boarding facility for remote Aboriginal students

in South Australia. Analysing interviews with staff, students and parents highlighted the impact of rules, discipline and autonomy on the experience of students (Benveniste et al., 2019). The study highlights the impact of day to day rules, routines and practices in the boarding house as focused more on Western, mainstream objectives. Establishing routines in a boarding house to ensure it runs efficiently can also diminish the cultural norms that students bring from their community. This creates structures which echo the concerns of Ford (2013) and Nakata (2003) who argue for equal consideration of Aboriginal world views, pedagogical approaches, language and practice in the contested space between cultures. Through this analysis the authors argue the importance of training to develop culturally reflective staff and broader organisational goals that allow for authentic community voice and student engagement rather than focusing on rules and routines to maintain day to day operations (Benveniste et al., 2019).

Despite CRT being employed in a diverse number of academic fields it broadly suits the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative methodologies such as story-telling and interviews empower groups normally excluded from the dominant discourse to have a voice. This can provide a vehicle to challenge and change the prevailing discourse (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Story-telling to illustrate aspects of inequality can act to dislodge the oppressive structures that exist towards Aboriginal people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The underlying belief is that counter story telling of previously unheard voices of Aboriginal people their experiences by itself help to resist ongoing discrimination and oppression (Yosso et.al. 2001; Larkin, 2016).

Relevance to Research – Critical Race Theory

According to Larkin (2016) a core tenet of CRT is the aim of providing authentic voices of marginalised groups. This study provides student voice to the issue of boarding school education for remote Aboriginal people. This provides benefits to the students and the broader community. The opportunity for students to reflect on and discuss their experiences can lead to positive action. Students were encouraged to share their reflections and understanding with the IYLP student committee

following the focus group discussions to consider further actions to improve the boarding school experience for other students.

Some theorists (Gillborn, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) argue that CRT should focus on how racism operates and is ingrained in our society. The western schooling system has been criticised for the social, cultural, physical, emotional, policy and jurisdictional impediments that make it difficult, if not impossible, for Aboriginal students to succeed (Beresford & Partington, 2003; Perso, 2012). This study examines how race operates and influences student experiences in a boarding school, particularly how it influences the challenges students face. Examination of the issue of boarding school provision through a CRT lens aimed to provide a mechanism for students to express their thoughts, ideas and opinions that were absent from much of the prevailing research and policies in this area.

This study employed focus group discussions and aimed to provide student voice to the topic of boarding school provision and the transition between remote communities and boarding school. The goal was to provide students with an opportunity to consider the structures that exist within a boarding school and examine ways to overcome them. It provided opportunities for the researcher and participants to question and some of the structures within boarding school in regard to race and make positive changes to address them.

Limitations

Positioning of the author

CRT promotes the voice of marginalized groups and individuals in conducting research (Larkin, 2016). For a non-Aboriginal researcher, CRT provides a useful theoretical lens to guide my actions and reflections as a researcher collecting and analyzing data and forming theories. I approached the study as an outsider, particularly relying on others to aid my understanding and exploration of this topic. Historical criticism of research in the area of Aboriginal education focuses on paternalistic approaches with limited input and voice from Aboriginal people and

communities (Rudolph, 2011; Vass, 2012). The qualitative approach acknowledges that reality is shaped by individual experiences and backgrounds (Creswell, 2009). As a caucasian middle class male, I bring my own subjective background, experiences and perspectives that impact on the research process. I have sought to address my privileged position in the study in a number of ways. My experience as a teacher at the school gave me some insight to the structural impediments that exist throughout the school and wider educational landscape for Aboriginal boarding students. The establishment of an Aboriginal Advisory Group helped provide insight into important cultural influences and provide advice and clarification through the study design and implementation. The group consisted of two teachers and one Aboriginal support staff at the school. The group met during the initial scoping visit and I sought advice through subsequent conversations and emails. Finally, the research was guided by the ethics process and protocols in place at the university to ensure that the representation of Aboriginal people and their involvement in the research process was meaningful, empowering and respectful. These mechanisms along with constant self-reflection, analysis and self-awareness of my role as a researcher when developing a grounded theory helped to offset my limited understanding as a non-Aboriginal researcher in this area.

Small Study Size

This is a small scale study which affects the ability to generalize findings or apply them to broader patterns or contexts. But the study does contribute to the 'truth' in students' experiences in boarding school and builds on the many studies that are emerging in this area.

Summary

CRT provides a theoretical lens to analyse the data collected in both qualitative and quantitative elements of the study. Thematic analysis was employed to interrogate data from the focus group discussions and interviews to form categories based on the student voice. Using CRT as a framework assisted in examining the transition process from an Aboriginal student's perspective. It also provided a tool to examine

the structural barriers in place within the boarding school environment that impacted the educational experience of Aboriginal boarding students from the Northern Territory. CRT provided an opportunity to empower students to address racial inequities that exist within the context of a boarding school.

Methodological Process

This section outlines the methodological approach used in this study and provides a detailed account of the process of data collection and analysis. The study used a mixed methods approach to investigate and analyse the experiences of Aboriginal students at a regional boarding school in the Northern Territory, Australia. Data collection was conducted in three phases outlined below. A timeline detailing estimated completion time for the study is also provided in Table 1 (page 45).

Phase 1 – Scoping visit and ethics proposal

Phase 2 – Quantitative data collection and analysis

Phase 3 – Qualitative data collection and analysis

Mixed Methods

In this study an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was used to enable greater breadth and depth of understanding through the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The usefulness of this approach centres on the flexibility provided to use both qualitative and quantitative information to form clear conclusions with practical, implementable outcomes (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). An explanatory sequential mixed methods approach involves collecting quantitative data and qualitative in two consecutive phases within one study (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The approach allowed for findings from stage one (quantitative analysis) to feed into focus group discussion questions in phase two (qualitative). Results were integrated to form conclusions and address the research questions

1) What individual, family, community and school influences enable Aboriginal students to successfully transition to a boarding school in the Northern Territory and stay there?

Table 1 Timeline for research.

		2016		2017				2018				2019	
Stage	**Task**	**Q3***	**Q4**	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Q1**	**Q2**
1. Proposal	Scoping visit												
	Proposal draft												
	Proposal final												
	Proposal presentation												
	Ethics application												
	Identification of participants												
	Send out consent forms												
2. Data collection	Quantitative data analysis												
	Focus group discussions												
	Data Analysis, coding and categories												
3. Thesis writing	Thesis draft												
	Thesis second draft												
	Thesis final draft												
	Thesis Submission												

**(Q1=January-March, Q2=April -June, Q3=July – September, Q4=October-December)*

2) What do Aboriginal students perceive to be the biggest challenges when transitioning to a boarding school from a remote community in the Northern Territory?

The quantitative data was collected from census information derived from school enrolment. Information relating to students' community, language background and family characteristics such as employment classification, language spoken at home and level of education is collected as part of the enrolment process. The quantitative data was then analysed. Students were grouped in the two groups, Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) students and non-IYLP students. Students in the IYLP program displayed evidence of leadership, academic achievement and strong extracurricular engagement throughout a prolonged period to time at the school. The data was analysed using Microsoft Excel to identify correlations that may have influenced the transition.

The qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and semi structured interviews with Aboriginal students from remote communities. Following transcription of the interviews, thematic analysis provided a voice and in-depth understanding of the lived experience of Aboriginal students regarding their transition from remote communities to regional boarding schools. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are described in more detail below.

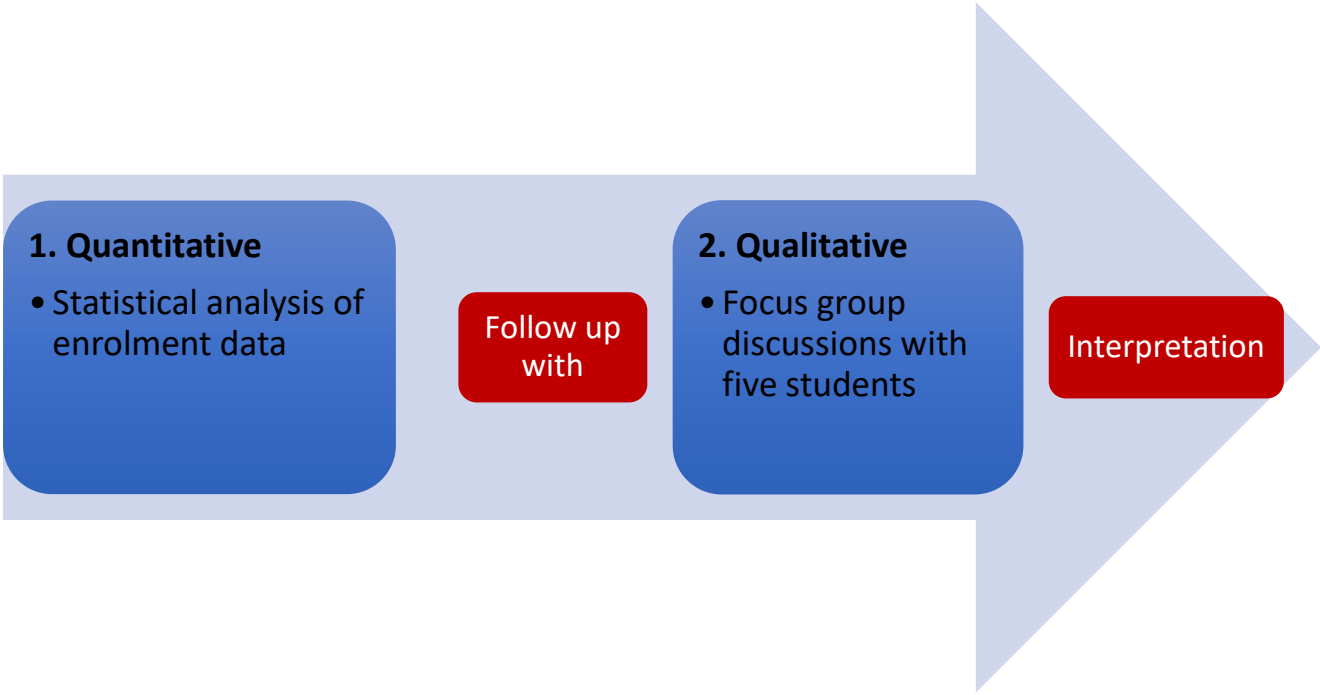

Figure 1 Explanatory Sequential mixed methods design process, adapted from Creswell and Plano (2011)

Phase 1 - Scoping visit and ethics proposal

Rationale

A three-day scoping visit was conducted in October 2016. The purpose of the scoping visit was to lay the groundwork for subsequent data collection and analysis. During the visit I met with student support staff to discuss the logistics for data collection and explain the purpose of the study. Discussions with staff helped to finalise the methodological approach and prepare the ethics proposal was required to undertake the study and adhered to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Australia;, 2007).

During the visit an Aboriginal advisory group was established consisting of three staff members who helped to guide the planning and implementation of the research. This reflects the approach used by Mander (2012) in his study design on the boarding experience for Aboriginal students in Western Australia. The advisory group consisted of one Aboriginal staff member in a non-academic role and two non-Aboriginal academic staff. The group met once during the scoping visit with follow up discussions occurring through Skype and email.

Phase 1 Procedure

1. Conducted informal conversations with staff and school administration to explain the purpose of the study.
2. Met with school support staff to ask for assistance with gaining parental consent and arranging students for interviews when ethics clearance was obtained.
3. Invited three staff members to form Aboriginal Advisory group to guide the planning and implementation of the research project.
4. Conducted first meeting with Aboriginal advisory group
5. Prepare ethics proposal and gain approval

Phase 2 - Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative aspect of the study used existing information collected during enrolment to identify key family and community factors that correlate with acceptance into the IYLP program. The quantitative data was derived from census information that is routinely collected during enrolment. This includes a range of family and community information such as the students' community name, language background of the student and parent/guardian. Other family characteristics such as employment classification, language spoken at home and level of education were included in the dataset.

This aspect of the study helped to identify broad individual, family and community factors that can influence success in boarding school. As part of a sequential mixed methods study, it also provided a basis for questions to guide the conversation in the focus group discussions.

Quantitative data collection procedure

1. Permission gained from the school Principal to obtain enrolment data from the school database.
2. Enrolment information for boarding students provided in an excel spreadsheet.
3. Use list of IYLP students to identify as IYLP or non-IYLP on the spreadsheet.
4. De-identify students from the data by removal of names
5. Develop a null hypothesis for each variable.

Null hypothesis 1: A students' language spoken at home has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Null hypothesis 2: The parent / guardian school year completed has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Null hypothesis 3: The parent /guardian language spoken at home has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Null hypothesis 4: The parent/guardian Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) occupation group has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 2 Converted nominal data into numerical categories for each Independent Variable

	Numerical Code						
Independent Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Student language	English	Yolgnu	Kriol	Walpiri	Maung	Aninailyakwa	Other
Parent Guardian non-school education	Advanced Diploma/ Diploma	Bachelor Degree or above	Certificate I to IV (inc trade certificate)	No non-school qualification	Not stated/ Unknown		
Parent Guardian school education	9 or equivalent	10 or equivalent	11 or equivalent	12 or equivalent			
Main language other than English spoken at home	English	Yolgnu	Kriol	Walpiri	Maung	Aninailyakwa	Other
Parent ACARA Occupation Group*	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 8	Group 9	

** Occupation Groups from Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (2017) (Group 1 = Senior management in large business organisation, government administration and defence, and qualified professionals Group 2 = Other business managers, arts/media/sportspersons and associate professionals Group 3 = Tradespeople, clerks and skilled office, sales and service staff Group 4 = Machine operators, hospitality staff, assistants, labourers and related workers Group 8 = Not in paid work in last 12 months Group 9 = Not stated or unknown)*

Process of analysis

1. Generated frequency tables.
2. Applied conditional formatting and identify variables to test.
3. Test relationship using Chi Squared procedure.
4. For the chi square analysis the following assumptions were used:

- Independent observations – each unit is a different person.
- All expected frequencies are greater than 5.
- Chi square analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel.

Integration of quantitative data into focus group discussion

Quantitative data analysis provided broad factors which may influence students participating in the IYLP program. These conclusions were integrated into the guiding questions for the focus group discussion and were further explored through the participants' views and perspectives. The discussion section combines findings from the quantitative analysis and qualitative focus group discussions to provide a deeper understanding of the issue from a range of perspectives.

Phase 2 – Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative aspect of the study involved focus group discussions with five Aboriginal boarding students who were enrolled at a regional secondary school in Darwin, Northern Territory. Two focus groups with four male students and one semi structured interview with a female student allowed the participants to express their thoughts and voice on the experience of transitioning to boarding school. This methodology was employed for the following reasons. First, it provides an opportunity for students to describe the boarding experience and explain the factors that helped or hindered them move from remote communities to boarding school. Second, it provides depth and substance to complement or counter the factors identified in the quantitative analysis.

Focus group discussions were held in November and December, 2017. Analysis was conducted from January to July, 2018.

Qualitative data collection process

1. Developed guiding questions to help structure the discussion (see Appendix 1). Questions were based on the literature review and outcomes of the quantitative analysis.
2. In consultation with school support staff IYLP students were identified for focus group discussions.
3. Written parent/ guardian consent obtained.
4. Date and time organised for focus group discussions with school support staff in a comfortable location within the school.
5. Explain to students that interview will be recorded, they will remain anonymous and they can stop or leave the FGD or the interview at any time they want.
6. The purpose of the study and benefits/risks were explained to all participants.
7. Verbal consent gained
8. Students had a chance to read questions to consider their responses. This gave students time to process the questions and provide meaningful replies.
9. Conducted focus group discussions with pre-arranged questions and spontaneous questions to focus the conversation.

10. FGDs/interviews took no longer than 45 minutes and were recorded on an audio recorder.

Qualitative Data Analysis

1. Interview data was transcribed into a Microsoft word document.
2. Document was loaded into SPSS coding program
3. Memos highlighted throughout the interviews concerning different themes
4. Codes conceptualized through visual mapping
5. Preliminary conclusions drawn
6. Data was re-analysed multiple times to gain data saturation.
7. Final conclusions and themes were developed.

Thematic analysis was employed, which is an inductive approach used to draw broad themes from close and repeated reading of transcribed qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). The process begins with transcription of interview data and repeated reading by the researcher before the before initial coding. Codes are labels assigned to sections of text that emerge from repeated readings. Similar codes are aggregated to form major themes which emerge from the data (Creswell, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

An application was prepared to identify and minimize any risks to participants in the study. Ethics approval is governed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) which follows the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2007). These guidelines provide researchers and Ethics Committees the values and principles of ethical conduct along with considerations of risk to participants weighed against the benefits of the research. The process of identifying potential risks for individuals and specific groups such as young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It helps to ensure that the research causes no harm to participants.

Ethics Approval

Ethics approval for the research project was granted from 26 September 2017 to 25 January 2018 by Edith Cowan University. A final report was completed in January 2018 and approved by the ethics committee. The process involved an explanation and accompanying evidence to ensure that the study did not identify or adversely impact on participants and the wider community. Some considerations are outlined below.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Participants

Students taking part in the focus group discussions had all been accepted into the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP). Acceptance into the program was used as the inclusion criteria for a successful transition into boarding school. The IYLP program is federally funded with the aim of identifying and supporting Aboriginal students to become leaders within their school and broader community (The Smith Family, 2014). Students were accepted into the program based on school staff references and recommendations, a written application and interviews with IYLP coordinators. The views and thoughts expressed by the students helped to explore the influences that contribute to a successful transition to boarding school from a remote community.

Recruitment Process

I recruited the participants for focus group discussions following consultation with school support staff. The support staff nominated 10 students and the researcher explained the purpose of the study and what it involved.

The participating students were all part of the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program which was used as an indicator for a successful transition into boarding school. Following the identification of students, the researcher contacted students' parents/ guardians through the school registrar. Many parents/ guardians were living outside of Darwin and contact and consent was sought via telephone with the assistance of the school registrar and boarding staff. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to parents, potential risks and

benefits, and the outcomes and applicability of the research. Parents/ guardians were sent a consent form and information sheet via email and fax that was signed and returned to the school.

This approach was considered to be an appropriate and respectful way to contact parents by the Aboriginal Advisory Group. The Group's feedback noted that regular parent contact is usually received through the registrar. This approach also considered logistical considerations such as the student body which came from a diverse range of communities across a large geographic area in the Northern Territory.

As high school students, the participants were mature enough to understand consent. Culturally, many students are considered adults in their own community after undergoing various initiation practice. Given their status as adults in their community, gaining consent from student participants was important prior to carrying out the interview. The investigator read through and discussed the information letter with students and offered the opportunity for students to express verbal and written consent. This was recorded on an audio recorder and the recordings were stored on a secure computer.

Permission from the School, Parents and Students

Undertaking studies with young Aboriginal people requires additional considerations (Benveniste, 2018). When interviews were being conducted there was a known and trusted school support staff in the room to support students. Permission was gained from the Principal of the school. The study was conducted at an Independent school and not a school run by the Northern Territory Department of Education. Research conducted in Government schools in the Northern Territory is subject to departmental approval (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2018). Written permission from the student's parents or guardians was obtained as they are under the age of 18. All students and parents received an information form regarding the study and verbal consent was given. Any student that wished to leave the discussion or withdraw from the study could do so at any time with no consequences.

This study focused on student voices and the researcher recognises the real power imbalance that exists between the participant and researcher. The research was conducted with the ethical values of beneficence, justice and respect for humans at the forefront. Ensuring that the consent process was truly understood by all participants was therefore essential. This was done through a conversation prior to commencing focus group discussions and semi structured interviews. Verbal consent was obtained on a recording before the interview. In this the researcher explained the consent form, the project and objectives. The researcher also emphasised that there was no obligation to participate in the discussion and that any participant could stop the interview at any time. The researcher also emphasised that there were no direct benefits for the interviewee or adverse consequences and that the interview results are confidential and all participants will be de-identified.

Risks to Participants

Focus group discussions focused on the individual, school and family / community influences that helped students transition from a remote community to boarding school. During interviews a risk was identified that students may experience discomfort and anxiety discussing topics that they find distressing or uncomfortable. In order to mitigate this, the guiding questions developed for the focus group discussions did not cover topics which could be distressing and support staff were available to counsel students if they were uncomfortable. No distress, or anxiety were reported by students during and after the discussions and interviews.

Considerations when working with young Aboriginal students

The establishment of an Aboriginal advisory group consisting of three staff members helped to guide the planning and implementation of the research. The advisory group consisted of one Aboriginal staff members in academic roles and two non-Aboriginal academic staff. They were important to help guide the researcher through the process to collect data in an ethical manner and provide advice in disseminating this information back to the school community, the student body and the wider community.

Limitations

Small study size

The scale of the study means that the results are not generalizable to a larger population outside of the school. It can be valuable to provide knowledge and information for the students, teaching staff and administration at the school. It can also be useful to provide a basis for further studies with greater depth and detail.

Timeframe

The timeframe to collect data was limited due to the researcher no longer residing in the Northern Territory. Data was collected over three days in November, 2017. This timeframe also limited the number of participants in the study, the original intention was to interview 6-12 students. Language and culture are still very strong in many communities in the Northern Territory (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2014). All Aboriginal boarding students at the school speak English, however it is often their second, third or fourth language. Students' ability to clearly articulate their ideas and experiences in English was identified as a potential limitation. Selecting students from the IYLP program addressed this concern as all students had experience in formal interview settings when applying for the scholarship. Having conducted interviews and discussions in the IYLP application process, they were considered to have a good level of spoken English. If more time and funding permitted, translation may have been available to allow the students to speak openly about their experience in their first language.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be assured to all participants. The data was stored in password protected files on the researchers' computer that cannot be accessed by other individuals or organisations. Paper copies of transcripts and notes were locked in a filing cabinet in the office of Dr David Rhodes on the ECU South West Campus. All stored data was non-identifiable.

Access

Permission to conduct the study was sought in November 2017. On the 7th of November, 2017 the school Principal responded and granted permission. The researcher proceeded to contact the school staff to discuss interview times, locations and participants.

Consent

Consent was obtained from all participants and their parents or guardian in writing. Each participant received a letter outlining the research and a consent form for their records, as well as the consent form that the researcher will keep. Parents and guardians in remote communities were contacted by the researcher who explained the purpose of the study. Parents completed the form and returned it to the school via email. Verbal consent was obtained by students prior to commencing the interviews. Students were also allowed to leave the interview at any time and the school support staff were available to assist and support students if necessary.

Chapter 3 Quantitative Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results from quantitative analysis of enrolment data collected by the school. The quantitative data was derived from census information that schools are required to collect during enrolment (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). The collection of this data began in 2005 to ensure government and non-government schools used common definitions of specified background variables to reporting on students' outcomes (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). It includes a range of student, family and community related information such as the age, students' community name, language background of the student and parent/guardian education level and job classification. Data regularly collected from school census records was analysed to determine if there are any significant individual or family factors which differ between students accepted into the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) and students who were not part of the program. The IYLP program targets Aboriginal students with motivation and high potential to complete Year 12, and a commitment to succeeding (The Smith Family, 2019). They must be willing to attend an IYLP approved education partner school and be eligible for ABSTUDY(The Smith Family, 2019). Students are accepted into this program based on references from school staff, parents/guardians, a handwritten personal statement and an in person interview (The Smith Family, 2019).

Data for 108 students and two parent / guardians were examined and null hypotheses were tested on four variables which met the criteria for a chi square test (table 3). The hypotheses were:

Null hypothesis 1: A students' language spoken at home has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Null hypothesis 2: The parent / guardian school year completed has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Null hypothesis 3: The parent /guardian language spoken at home has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Null hypothesis 4: The parent/guardian Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) occupation group has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Total number of data points (*n*) are listed in each table. Several student and parent data points were not collected during the enrolment process. Missing data points for each hypothesis were excluded from the analysis. Four individual and family factors were analysed including; student language spoken at home, parent/ guardian school education, parent/ guardian main language spoken at home and parent occupation status. Data relating to other factors did not meet the assumptions for the chi square test. The results are presented below along with short conclusions. The results were used to inform the qualitative stage of data collection and are also integrated into the discussion section to highlight relevant points.

Background

Data was available for 108 students, 34 of whom were in the IYLP program. Most students had data for two parents / guardians. The number of data points for each variable is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Total number of data points for each variable

Factor	**Variables**	**IYLP**	**Non IYLP**	**Total**
Student home language	1) English 2) Other	33	73	106
Parent / guardian school education	Year 11 or 12 2) Year 9 or 10	49	131	180
Parent/ Guardian main language spoken at home	1) English 2) Other	44	125	169
Parent ACARA* occupation group	1) Group 8* 2) Employed	48	128	176

* Group 8 occupation group*: This category is used for participants who have not been in paid work for the previous 12 months or longer (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017).*

The data was sorted into IYLP and non-IYLP groups and frequency tables were generated for each variable using Microsoft Excel.

Chi Square Test Results

Chi square tests actual results versus expected results to determine if the null hypothesis was supported or rejected in each instance. The p value was calculated using 2 degrees of freedom (*v).* For each set of values with the critical value of 5.991 used to test for significance at a .05 level. Assumptions relating to the test were that no single value can be

below five and the actual and expected array of values have to be the same. Both assumptions were met in all instances.

Student language spoken at home

Null hypothesis: A students' language spoken at home has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Table 4 Actual values, student language spoken at home

	English	**Other**	**TOTAL**
IYLP	11	22	**33**
Non-IYLP	25	48	**73**
TOTAL	**36**	**70**	**106**

Table 5 Expected values, student language spoken at home

	English	**Other**
IYLP	11.20754717	21.79245283
Non IYLP	24.79245283	48.20754717

The p-value is .926754. This result is **not significant** at $p < .05$.

Result is >.05 which means the null hypothesis is accepted. In the data shown, there is no significant difference between IYLP students and non IYLP students in the language spoken at home.

Parent / Guardian School year completed

Null hypothesis: The parent / guardian school year completed has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Table 6 Actual values, Parent / Guardian school year completed

	Year 11 or 12	**Year 9 or 10**	**TOTAL**
IYLP	23	26	**49**
Non-IYLP	25	106	**131**
TOTAL	**48**	**132**	**180**

Table 7 Expected values, Parent / Guardian school year completed

	Year 11 or 12	**Year 9 or 10**
IYLP	13.06666667	35.93333333
Non IYLP	34.93333333	96.06666667

The chi-square statistic is 14.149. The critical value for 2*v* at .05 is 5.991.

The p-value is .000169. This result is **significant** at $p < .05$ meaning the null hypothesis is not supported. This indicates that there is a relationship between the parent / guardian school year completed and acceptance into the IYLP program.

Parent / Guardian language spoken at home

Null hypothesis: *The parent /guardian language spoken at home has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.*

Table 8 Actual values, Parent / Guardian language spoken at home

	English	**Other**	**TOTAL**
IYLP	19	25	**44**
Non-IYLP	27	98	**125**
TOTAL	**46**	**123**	**169**

Table 9 Expected values, Parent / Guardian language spoken at home

	English	**Other**
IYLP	11.97633136	32.02366864
Non IYLP	34.02366864	90.97633136

The chi-square statistic is 7.6518. The critical value for 2*v* at .05 with 2 degrees of freedom is 5.991.

The p-value is .005672. This result is **significant** at <.05 meaning the null hypothesis is not supported. This indicates that there is a relationship between the parent / guardian language spoken at home and acceptance into the IYLP program.

Parent / Guardian work status

Null hypothesis: The parent/guardian ACARA occupation group has no effect on acceptance into the IYLP program.

Table 10 Actual values, Parent / Guardian work status

	Group 8*	**Employed**	**TOTAL**
IYLP	21	27	**48**
Non-IYLP	73	55	**128**
TOTAL	**94**	**82**	**176**

Table 11 Expected values, Parent / Guardian work status

	Group 8	**Working**
IYLP	25.63636364	22.36363636
Non IYLP	68.36363636	59.63636364

The chi-square statistic is 2.4746. The critical value for 2*v* at .05 is 5.991.

The p-value is .115701. This result is **not significant** at $p < .05$. The null hypothesis is supported. This data indicates that there is no significant relationship between the parent / guardian ACARA occupation group and acceptance into the IYLP program.

Conclusion

Four hypotheses were tested focusing on student factors (language spoken at home) and family factors (parent / guardian school education level, parent / guardian language spoken at home and parent / guardian occupation status). The chi square analysis revealed that the level of school education and parent language spoken at home was significant and the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a relationship between these factors and acceptance into the IYLP program. The level of school education obtained by parents and guardians could influence the probability of a student to gain acceptance into the IYLP program. Situations in which a parent spoke English as the main language home is another possible factor influencing acceptance into the IYLP program. Two other factors, parent / guardian work status and student language spoken at home did not have a significant difference between actual and expected values.

The conclusion to student language spoken at home and parent language spoken at home differ. The analysis indicates that the student language is not significant, in contrast to parent language spoken at home, which was statistically significant and the null hypothesis was not supported. Further investigation into this aspect would be helpful. The significance may arise from the larger number of data points for the parent/ guardians (169 parents versus 106 students). These results are incorporated into the semi structured qualitative interviews and are further analysed in the discussion section.

Chapter 4 Qualitative Results

Introduction

The mixed methods study involved an initial quantitative stage involving the analysis of enrolment data. The results were incorporated into two focus group discussions and one semi structured interview in the qualitative data collection phase (Appendix 1). Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted with a total of five students. All students were currently enrolled in the school and were participants in the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP). Interviews and discussions were between 25-35 minutes long. Background information for these students is summarised in table 12.

Table 12 Interview participant background information

	Student	**Gender**	**Age**	**Year Level**	**Years attending boarding school**
Focus group discussion 1	1	Male	14	9	2
	2	Male	17	11	5
Semi structured interview	3	Female	18	12	5
Focus group discussion 2	4	Male	18	12	4
	5	Male	16	11	2

The qualitative data collection and analysis focused on both research questions:

1) What individual, family, community and school influences enable Aboriginal students to successfully transition to a boarding school in the Northern Territory and stay there?
2) What do Aboriginal students perceive to be the biggest challenges when transitioning to a boarding school from a remote community in the Northern Territory?

Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phase will be included in the discussion section.

Theme outline

Thematic analysis was conducted, and major themes and sub themes were developed. Initially interviews were transcribed and initially read for familiarisation. Following this codes were initially gathered on printed copies of the interview on the left hand margin. After multiple readings codes were recorded under themes using NVivo 12 for Mac software. From these codes themes and sub themes were developed through repeated reading, reflection and analysis. Themes and sub themes are summarised in the Table 13.

Table 13 Summary of themes and sub themes from qualitative analysis

Theme	**Sub Theme**
2.1 Challenges	2.1.1 Communication
	2.1.2 Homesickness
	2.1.3 Shame
2.2 Family and Community	2.2.1 Expectations
	2.2.2 Family and community support
2.3 Benefits of school	2.2.3 Opportunities
	2.2.4 Support from school staff
2.4 Understanding culture and connection to country	

2.1 Challenges

The theme of challenges encompasses a range of difficulties and obstacles faced by students transitioning successfully to boarding school. These include external communication with family in community and also challenges related to communication at school. Homesickness was another prominent sub theme along with strategies to overcome it. Shame also emerged as a sub theme in some discussions with the impact that this has on students feeling comfortable and safe in a boarding school environment.

2.1.1 Communication

Some students coming from remote communities still have very real communication challenges for day to day contact with family.

"There's no service back home so you just call the nearest pay phone" (Student 3)

With no mobile phone service the student often does not have enough mobile phone credit to call a pay phone in community. As a result, the student is dependent on phones in the boarding house in which calls to family are limited*, "sometimes at the boarding we are only allowed phone calls twice a week or sometimes when it's in an emergency."* (Student 3)

This creates tension and stress for Student 3 who relies on family for support and understanding when dealing with issues that arise in boarding school.

"If I don't have anyone to talk to I can always call back home and talk to them. And things that people don't understand about me I can call back home and talk to them about that." (Student 3)

Student 3 has been at the school for over five years, but they note that communication with family is a challenge for many new students. Other students from the same community are used to being home with family, and the lack of daily communication and contact is challenging. She notes that *"for other students they used to be home with family."* Families provide an important support mechanism according to Student 3, and the inability to contact family members whenever it is necessary provides a challenge for new students.

This suggests that a period and process of readjustment is required when making a move from a small, family oriented remote community to boarding school in a major urban centre. The absence of family and other support structures appears to be challenging when students initially move to boarding school. Student 3 stated that it *"took me about, ah, two years to get myself you know comfortable in the dorms".* Communication could be a vital

support mechanism, but when access is limited it can contribute to homesickness, another sub theme that emerged from the data.

2.1.2 Homesickness

Homesickness is a key sub theme under challenges that all students experienced in the transition to boarding school. Students described the feelings associated with homesickness in some detail.

"*You feel like you're on your own like. No one to hang with. But yeah, over time you get friends to be with."* (Student 4)

Researcher: Ok, so you feel homesick how often?
Student 1: Um, every, once, once a day.

"*Yeah like when there's no one to hang out with so get homesick. Even when you get bullied at school and, and there's no one there with you sometimes*." (Student 3)

"*Um miss the place, um, every time like when I go like listening to music, country songs, it gives me some memories of back home, yeah like that."* (Student 1)

For Student 1 homesickness was related to a strong connection to country. It is a feeling that affects his whole physical and emotional self.

Researcher: Do you feel different when you're away from your land?
Student 1: Definitely.
Researcher: Can you describe it?
Student 1: Bit of sadness in your body. Feel like left out and feel lonely.

Student 2 described the sudden change from a familiar environment and routine of community as one of the causes of homesickness.

"Well first coming here I was getting homesick, missing family. You have to get used to not being able to do what you wanted walk around, muck around you know. You just got a bit more harder after that." (Student 2)

The concept of "hardening" when successfully transitioning to boarding school was echoed by Student 4 and 5. They referred to their ability to move to boarding school and stay there are a result of having "toughness" or having "tough backs" which they attribute to their family and upbringing. This suggests that overcoming and dealing with homesickness requires a certain amount of toughness to work through this challenge.

Attending boarding school involves a highly structured day, but periods of down time when there are no scheduled activities increases the risk of homesickness. Between the end of classes and dinner in the cafeteria students have free time without any organised or structured activities. Student 1 noted that these are the times when feelings of homesickness increased, "*when you're not doing things, when you get bored you always think like homesick*". Some students left the school grounds in this time, but Student 3 reflected that this was a challenging time for those students who remained in the boarding house.

"*It gets boring because when I get back from school to the dorms some kids just go off to Casuarina [shopping centre] you know, some way. But those that stay have wait until they do dinner and just go back to the dorms and do our homework*." (Student 3)

Having a range of activities or strategies helped students overcome this boredom and the resulting homesickness. The strategies that students use to overcome homesickness varied, however all involved surviving or hanging on for a period of time before it got better. Student 5 said that "*getting used to the school and your friends*" helped to cope with homesickness. Others looked to countrymen, other students from their community, for support.

"Hanging with mates that helped yeah a lot because you always had someone there to make you laugh." (Student 2)

Researcher: What about you when you first arrived? What helped you stop being homesick?
Student 4: My brother
Student 5: Probably my friends and family.

Outside activities were used by students to combat the onset of homesickness.

"It depends on what kind of activities they give you. Cause when I got home sick. We used to do these activities that made me get out of that you know." (Student 3)

"So like for example it would be like just a regular activity going to watch the footy you're homesick or something or an actual activity to help you not be homesick." (Student 3)

"*Going out shopping. Just go cruising around and see other things."* (Student 1)

When asked to provide advice for future boarders, Students 1 and 2 framed their advice around short term goals and counting down the weeks until returning home. This helped cope with the separation from community and provides a frame of reference for their experience at boarding school.

Student 2: It's only a short time in your life. It may feel like forever, but once you get back it's gone, you know.

Student 1: Four terms.

Student 2: Goes quick aye.

Researcher: So you just want to get through it and go home?

Both: Yeah

Student 2: The quicker you get through it the quicker you go home. Then you don't have to worry about it you know.

Student 1: Four terms and ten weeks woah, it's no time.

This suggests that the experience of boarding school is something to be endured until returning to normal life in community. The students acknowledge that the experience is tough but something to be endured.

2.1.3 Shame

Shame emerged as a sub theme that students had to negotiate when transitioning to boarding school. Shame operates inside and outside of the classroom. In some ways it stems from the social and cultural differences between remote Aboriginal communities and boarding schools steeped in European cultural and social norms. Some shame experienced in the classroom is related to different social norms and practices.

"Well, like at home if they want to share their story. They sit in a circle. Whereas in the school they want to share their story, one has to get up in front of everyone and talk about the topic then sit down. Yeah that's different for me because like when everyone is like seated in a circle it makes it easier to talk because they're at the same level. Where here like, you have to get in front of everyone like, and it's a shame job you know, talking in front of everyone. Especially people that you don't know." (Student 3)

When the structures, design and activities in the classroom are radically different between community and boarding school the resultant shame can have a major impact on their learning. Shame also impacts on student behaviour. Student 3 describes how actions that are different to friends, countrymen and other boarding students can lead to shame.

"Well when I first, a couple of years ago when I was Year 9 or something. Before, I was following my countrymen around wagging and prowling. When I was in Year 9 I started to

change things and like going to classes and all that. And people thought it was a shame job, you know, I did these things and they did not." (Student 3)

The influence of other students and a sense of shame can have a large impact on student behaviour and choices at boarding school. The repercussions of this can be negative behaviour in a school. For example, one student stated:

"*Hanging around the wrong people that might give you bad choices. Because I've seen that a lot of umm of my time here. And once you can take the good student away from that they can develop more like be a better person from that*." (Student 3)

The challenge of shame appears as both internalised at a student level, but also influenced by peers. This shame can result in students displaying challenging and negative behaviour along with the internalised impact.

2.2 Family and Community

Family were an important theme to emerge from the data, with a number of influences that impact on the transition from remote communities to boarding school. Tension and challenges can arise when students are positioned within a more individualistic cultural setting at boarding school. This theme is broken down into two sub themes of expectations and support.

2.2.1 Expectations

The expectations that family have on students emerged from the analysis under the theme of family and community. The quantitative data indicated that parent / guardian school level completed and parent / guardian language spoken at home were significant. Students provided some elaboration on the importance of family and how boarding school can influence and impact on connections in community. This included persistent encouragement and advocacy of parents and guardians on behalf of students. Student 1

noted that his parents strongly encouraged him to go to boarding school when he was reluctant to return from holiday breaks.

Researcher: Do they think boarding school is a good thing? Do they tell you you have to go?
Student 1: Yeah but… some time I just don't want to go.
Researcher: What did they say then?
Student 1: Go.

When prompted for the reasons behind their parents' encouragement, Student 1 said:

"Think ah. Education I think. And money, something like that." (Student 1)

Asked to elaborate on what his parents meant by the term education the student described the importance of staying at school until Year 12.

"Finish Year 12 and then you can do what you wanna do." (Student 1)

Some students noted that parental expectations arose from their own work and life experiences. Student 2 clearly related how a family member provided clear advice which can act as a model for younger students. When the student expressed his interest in joining the police force:

"But um, every time I do that. My father figure always ends up saying nah you don't want to do that. Because he been in the police, he's been in the army, he's done all this. So he's had experience and he always says nah you don't want to do that." (Student 2)

Student 2 also notes that parental choice and agency influenced his attendance at boarding school. This indicates that parents having a clear reason for the choice in boarding school could be an influence on student successfully transitioning. When asked why his mother chose this particular boarding school, the response was:

"Because at the time it was the best. It was number one in the Northern Territory or something. Second reason was because it was a Christian school." (Student 2)

Along with expectations placed upon the student, a parents' expectations of what a boarding school provides can also influence the experiences and success of their child's transition. Student 2 further elaborated that their Mother's agency in moving her children to boarding school further reinforces the importance of parental expectations;

"My Mum became upset about it because once found out how I was being treated and how my sister was being treated [at the community school] even though she was a lot smarter than the teachers were letting on." (Student 2)

2.2.2 Family and community support

Alongside expectations, another sub theme throughout the interviews involved parental and broader family support throughout the transition to boarding school. All students noted that moving between home and boarding school was a challenging transition with homesickness a part of their early experiences. The day to day support provided by family in community was referred to by students.

"When I came to [school name] it was a bit hard moving away from family. Back home you can see them every day." (Student 3)

"They like grow me up and I sometime feel home sick" (Student 1)

Despite the distance separating boarding students and their family, many still relied on support from family to stay in boarding school and succeed. This support emerged in a number of ways. Student 3 noted that family reinforced the benefits of boarding school and the perceived value over staying in community.

“They kept encouraging me saying ‘Oh do you want to be at home doing nothing or do you want to be at school and learn something?’" (Student 3)

Student 3 further elaborated on family support and encouragement.

“Things like, ‘And if you come back home like there's nothing you can do other than just working and doing bad things. At school you can learn more and get that understanding of what life is and just get everything out of school as much as you can because you might use it later in life’ that sort of thing they’d say.” (Student 3)

Overall family support, encouragement and motivation was a strong influence on staying at boarding school and achieving success.

“Back home I had the support that I needed and that helped me a lot when I came here. And their support was what I needed to finish school and knowing that I have someone behind me pushing through that had helped me with all the homesickness and all that” (Student 3)

Conversely, Student 2 emphasised that the day to day support from having family close by was missing in boarding school. The reference was particularly around the close knit nature of a small community with strong family ties throughout it. The proximity and access to family changes when moving to a large urban centre, making the natural connections with family more challenging.

“You always got family. To have a house live with them. You can go stay with any family member Auntie, Uncle it doesn't matter you know. But here you can't really go visit your family you know. It's hard to walk there unless they live around the block. Which I'm pretty sure is rare to see unless to have like a family member that lives around the corner. So yeah it would be harder to live in the city rather than around the corner.” (Student 2)

While family support was important, distance still limits the ability to help some students as they transition to boarding school.

2.3 Benefits of school

A major theme to emerge from the data was school related opportunities available at boarding school. Students could clearly identify a range of opportunities that boarding school provided both inside and outside of the classroom. These formed the first sub theme of opportunities. Students enjoyed the social aspects and opportunities provided in a larger city or urban centre. These activities included shopping, watching new movies at the cinema and playing footy for big clubs. At a deeper level they noted the opportunities to travel, interact with different people and experience a range of jobs and careers as important opportunities provided at boarding school.

Students also frequently mentioned teachers and other school staff as important factors in overcoming the challenges faced with the social, emotional, cultural and educational challenges faced in boarding school. This teacher and school staff support formed the second sub theme to emerge within the broader theme of school and opportunities.

2.3.1 Opportunities

Students frequently associated boarding school with a variety of opportunities that they were unable to access or experience in community. These include learning, social experiences, scholarships and other advantages to attending boarding school. Many students acknowledge that the experiences offered in boarding school also widened their world view.

The immediate opportunities gained from living in a large urban center were noted by Student 1 and Student 2. The reflections related to the wider range of activities available in the city compared to their community. For example;

“If you live out somewhere small like out in community. It's tough to go and do more activities you know? You can't go see much.” (Student 2)

“*In the bush, you go fishing and all. Fishing, that's fun and all. Sometimes you need to like go into a city*.” (Student 1)

Gaining a sense of independence from family was considered another benefit and opportunity for students moving to boarding school. Despite the homesickness and important connection and support from family, being able to spend time away in formative teenage years was helpful in gaining independence. It also provides a glimpse into challenges between traditional educational approaches in community and individualistic social structures and schooling systems that students have to move between.

"I reckon it just gives you that time away from family. So a lot went on with family, I learned alot from family but sometimes I just need to step back and learn something on my own you know and the boarding house helps that alot." (Student 2)

All students were recipients of the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) scholarships. However, the extent to which they recognized and valued the benefits of this and other programs varied amongst students. Student 3 was grateful for the support and clearly articulated the previous and ongoing opportunities provided through scholarships and similar programs such as the Aspire program.

"Well they helped me financially when I like need stuff, like school stuff. And they helped me with trips they helped me with shoes like they are there when I need someone. Something like this. Another career change they can help me with that. Get into uni [university] and all that." (Student 3)

Conversely, Students 4 and 5 had limited recognition of the benefits provided by the program, focusing on tangible things like celebration dinners and homework support.

Researcher: What did they do to help you out?
Student 4: I never really got help from them.
Researcher: You noticed anything with them?
Student 5: It's just dinners and that.
Student 4: Help you with homework and stuff.

Scholarships and similar programs appear to provide important opportunities for students to successfully remain at boarding school. However the impact of this on students and their willingness to embrace these opportunities can vary (Bobongie, 2017b). Several students noted that their experiences at boarding school led to increased knowledge of the opportunities that existed. Students 4 and 5 framed post school opportunities around job availability and readiness, stating that boarding school "*gives you more opportunities. Lot of work, jobs.*" (Student 4). Their opportunities to travel and the range of experiences at boarding school also provided motivation for many students to travel or see new places.

"I want to just travel around a little. Go see some nice sites um, go visit some ancient ruins and stuff. Go see how they all work. Yeah I heard some stories about how they use their piping." (Student 2)

"No I didn't want to leave (community) but ever since really went to trips like interstate that made me want to travel around and see other countries you know other places." (Student 3)

Conversely, Student 2 was still reluctant or uncertain about the overall benefits of the opportunities presented at boarding schools. Towards the end of the interview the student noted that *"It's a bit more bad for me."* Asked for clarification, he responded that boarding school had needed to be focused more on "*Teaching you the safest way to save money. Boarding basically doing the same thing than if you were at home you know, it's just that you're further away."* (Student 2). This description balances the travel and geographic opportunities presented while hinting that the day to day learning was not focused on his needs.

The exposure to different environments, ideas and experiences provides a broader worldview for students to understand the range of opportunities in the broader community. Discussing family members, Student 3 noted that boarding school is an opportunity for reform, or for students to be removed from bad influences in community. In contrast to opportunities that provide experiences that are unavailable in community, it is also seen by students as an opportunity to escape negative influences in community.

"*But I think like because my little sisters is mad. And I think boarding school is as a consequence for them. And like I think that for them what they are going to boarding schools that are a long way in that strict um… I think like it can help them you know get away from people that are giving them a bad influence and all that."* (Student 3)

2.3.2 Support from school staff

Teachers were an important school-based support mechanism for students, and some students noted that teachers in boarding school were more helpful and supportive than previous schools with higher expectations. Students noted qualities of teachers that are "*funny*" (Student 2) but balanced with "*making sure you get you get your work done. Being strict is important"* (Student 5). Persistent encouragement and support from school staff was also an important influence on students.

Starting off as a challenging students, school staff are credited with a large influence on their successful transition to boarding school. Student 3 noted that *"teachers encouraged me to take up every opportunity that people offered to me and by taking those opportunities, it helped me to grow more confident and just have more courage.* (Student 3). The student also reflected on the importance of encouragement to go to class and stay at school.

"The teachers encouraged me to go to classes all day, every day. And they encouraged me to get out of trouble and that which has helped me and things like that have helped me shape who I am now." (Student 3)

Not all teachers were positive, and continued encouragement and positive regard was noted by Student 3 as important for engaging with challenging students. Some teachers had limited patience and encouragement but "*those teachers that don't give up on them you know and just keep encouraging them that makes them change. You know like from bad to good."* (Student 3). Further elaboration from Student 3 focused on the need for continued encouragement and support, looking for longer term outcomes.

“It's like no matter how many bad things they have done. They keep encouraging them to go class, and like surprise them with good things so that they can see that if they do good that's what they'll get.” (Student 3)

2.4 Understanding Culture and Connection to Country

The final theme to emerge from the data was the influence of culture in the transition from community to boarding school. The references to country were also strong leading to the creation of the overarching theme of understanding culture and connection to country. There were some similarities between earlier themes of homesickness and connection to country, however the influence of culture in this connection led to it being incorporated into this theme.

Students described strong ties to their land and culture which are affected when leaving for long periods. Student 2 expressed that *“you've got to admit if you’re going to die somewhere you wouldn't want to die somewhere you're not familiar with.”*

Student 2 has grown up away from his family land in western NSW. Yet he still expresses a clear connection and resonance with where he comes from and notes how this is opposed to many:

“Even though I haven't learned much from there. Something about where you were born is always with you, you know. You can't shake it. You can be born from the North Pole and you'll still miss being there you know. All the people from overseas they all end up coming here and saying I love it here more than home. But blokes like me and ___ there's nothing better than home.” (Student 2)

The challenges of moving between traditional communalistic social structures and individualist Western social structures that predominate boarding schools presents challenges.

"Well like if you're in a city. In the city you have to pay for everything you know. But if you're out, out in community you don't have to. In community a lot of it you'll trade or you go out and get yourself. Something you'll have to pay for but it ain't that much you know. It's just easier. Like when you have to deal with money. Cos if you're in the city everything's about money you know. So if you don't have money you can't live somewhere. You can't eat you can't do nothing you know. But out in community you don't need money you see. Just go out bush, get your food, come back, cook it and you'll be set you know." (Student 3)

The focus on money and independence as essential to surviving in a city contrasts deeply with the experience of Student 3 in community. Grappling with this, understanding it and then being able to survive and thrive for most of the year in a different social and cultural structure appears to be challenging.

Several students discussed the impact of being at boarding school on their culture. Being away at boarding school for multiple years impacts on the students' connection to culture. This in turn can be difficult to learn alongside the absence from community required by attending boarding school.

Researcher: Does your family think it's good or bad? Do they. What do they say? To miss culture because you're going to boarding school.
Student 1: Bad

In particular, students noted that forgetting or "losing" culture is a potential consequence of attending boarding school. The degree to which it affects students varied. For example, student 2 stated:

"When you're here you know coming here is tough. When you first get here, but just remember everyone else started out the same you know. So if you're ever worried about leaving home, forgetting culture or something. Just remember what you've learned ok."
(Student 2)

This loss is framed in different ways by students, some see it as a temporary loss that can be "recharged" by returning to community. Others see longer term difficulties and challenges relating to loss of culture. Student 3, set to graduate after attending boarding school for multiple years recognised a large impact on her culture.

"Because I've been away from home for six years and I've lost my culture. Like I couldn't remember how things work and all that. So every time when I went back I had to ask my great grandmother like what was happening, what people are doing you know and she helped me understand." (Student 3)

Gaining help from family back home allowed Student 3 to retain culture, revealing a sense of recharging culture that is lost or forgotten when away from community. The student notes this with a sense of regret, wanting to return to community after graduating to work at the local school.

"I just want to go back and start over again start learning about my culture and what I've missed when I was here. And just take up as much as I can." (Student 3)

Student 3 has ambitions to pursue further study, travel and see different places yet it remains a challenging balance between duties and importance of culture and community which is central to their life. She stated:

"Now that I can go home and stay there and it will help me remember things that I lost here." (Student 3)

Students 4 and 5 had differing views on the impact of boarding school on culture

Researcher: Is there an impact on your culture when you're away from community?
Student 4: Nah
Student 5: Yeah. You start to forget things

Student 5 elaborates by stating that the loss of culture stems from “being away from home” for too long. Student 4 is more confident in his culture due to the long time spent in Darwin with family throughout his childhood. This experience could act as a buffer between abruptly leaving community and culture to attend boarding school versus students who have spent time outside of community with family before attending boarding school.

Language and culture are also strongly intertwined, and many boarding students from remote communities speak English as a second, third or fourth language (Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2015; Wilson, 2014). This provided a challenging transition for Student 3:

“In schools back home. I was more used to speaking in language than when I came to Darwin, it was harder understanding what the teacher was saying. But I had someone to translate for me what they were saying.” (Student 3)

This contrasts to Student 4, from a community in Elcho Island, NT. His confidence in the local language and dialect meant that mother tongue programs and learning in language was not an aspect of culture that he missed.

Researcher: Do you miss learning in language?
Student 4: Nah, I already know it.

Conclusion

Student voice and their experiences provides valuable insights into the challenges and supports when successfully transitioning to boarding school. Key challenges included communication with family in remote communities due to barriers with infrastructure and access. As family was regarded as an important support mechanism to discuss problems and provide support, being able to communicate constantly was essential for students to negotiate the challenges of moving to boarding school.

Homesickness was a prominent challenge, particularly when students initially move to boarding school. The feelings associated with homesickness are exacerbated by boredom

and a lack of activities. Students noted that some challenges brought about by homesickness can be deeply influential on their ability to remain at boarding school. Having friends, countrymen and a range of activities can help alleviate homesickness.

Shame was a common experience for students in a different, challenging cultural environment of boarding school. Shame in the classroom can arise from cultural practices and expectations that differ from those in a students' home community. The broader influence of shame amongst peers can also contribute to negative behaviours and students getting into trouble when influenced by their peers.

Family and community were considered strong support mechanisms despite the challenge of distance and separation. Parents and family members expressed a range of expectations which gave guidance for students when moving to the challenging and unfamiliar environment of boarding school. Previous experience of parents at boarding school was helpful for students along with their clear expectations for students to stay at school and make the most of opportunities presented by students.

Students identified a number of benefits and opportunities provided by attending boarding school. This included access to a range of new activities and experiences that are not available in community. The opportunity to travel, meet new people and experience new places was also valued. The support from school staff, in particular teachers, was also valued within boarding school. Teachers and support staff who exhibited a sense of humour, and continued encouragement and support were valued. Teachers and staff who could mix this with being firm or strict were also valued by students.

A final theme emerging strongly from the data was the negative impact of separation from family and community on a students' culture and connection to country. Students expressed concern and dismay that they had lost or forgotten important aspects of culture and placed importance on needing to spend time in community to relearn culture and maintain connections to the land. The tension between the opportunities and importance of boarding school and the impact of this on culture was prominent within this theme. The role of culture, and challenges of students moving between cultures will be further discussed in the

next chapter with the comparisons of similar studies and analysis of different perspectives from the literature.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings and a discussion of the results relating to current literature. It also highlights the significance of the study and recommendations and suggestions for future research. Results from the quantitative and qualitative data will be employed to address the research questions. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data in this section helps to gain a different aspects of the factors influencing a successful transition to boarding school. . Current literature focusing on the boarding school experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be used to explore findings such as the role and influence of parents and family, the impact of boarding on culture, homesickness and teacher and staff support. The exploratory nature of the study would make it difficult to generalise the results to other educational contexts. However, a number of pertinent findings highlight the importance of this study. The final section of the chapter provides recommendations and suggestions for future research based on the findings.

Summary of key findings

The aim of this exploratory study was to identify factors which enable Aboriginal students from remote communities to successfully transition to boarding school. Gaining a place in the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program run by the Smith Family at the school was used as an indication of a successful transition in the context of this study. Information was collected using a sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The study also sought to examine aspects of the transition process that are particularly challenging. These aims resulted in two research questions:

1. What individual, family, community and school influences enable Aboriginal students to successfully transition to a boarding school in the Northern Territory and stay there?
2. What do Aboriginal students perceive to be the biggest challenges when transitioning to a boarding school from a remote community in the Northern Territory?

The key findings related to each question are summarised in this section. Following this, is a more detailed discussion of key themes and findings is provided relating to other reports, studies and literature.

Research question one: individual, family, community and school influences which enable Aboriginal students to successfully transition to a boarding school in the Northern Territory

Individual

Students reported the sense of independence and identity as beneficial aspects of boarding school. Student brought a strong sense of culture and language to provide a foundation to deal with the changes at school. They also recognised the positive benefits of schooling to help them through difficult periods of separation and homesickness. Students had a mastery of the English language to allow them to advocate for themselves and clearly communicate with school staff, boarding staff and others. Despite the challenges of homesickness, being away at boarding school provided opportunities to grow and develop independently from family and community. Students recognised the importance of family in their lives but appreciated the opportunities offered by boarding school. At the same time, students noted how different notions of family, independence and culture impacted on them. This highlights the challenges that some students face negotiating two vastly different cultural settings and the impact that this has on students.

Individual factors were not analysed in great detail in this study due to the limited scope and time available for this research. Some aspects such as resilience, aspiration and academic skills could be areas for further focused research.

Family

Students frequently cited family as an important influence when moving to boarding school. All students who participated in focus group discussions and interviews noted that their parents had previous experience at boarding school which helped them understand the challenges that students were facing. Several influences from family members helped students to transition. The quantitative analysis indicated that parents who stated that English was the main language spoken at home had children who were more likely to enter the IYLP program. A similar relationship in the quantitative data was between a parent/ guardian level of education and students' participation in boarding school. This indicates that a parents' educational achievement could have an impact on the successful transition of their children to boarding school.

Community

A small number of community influences emerged from the data. This included the students' role and responsibilities within their community and challenges of fulfilling these remotely. Students came from a wide range of communities throughout the Northern Territory varying in terms of population, infrastructure and remoteness. Students held a strong connection to country, family and community which made the transition away to boarding school a challenging one. Some students discussed the tension between their roles as future leaders in their community and the opportunities for further study and work that would keep them away from community.

School

Students cited the opportunities available at boarding school as an important benefit of attending boarding school. Scholarships and the exposure to new places and people gave students motivation to seek out further study, travel and job opportunities. Boarding school was also seen as a consequence for siblings who were getting into trouble in their community. This suggests that the structure and discipline that are prominent within the boarding school system can provide an alternative for students participating in negative behaviours in their community.

Research question two: What do Aboriginal students perceive to be the biggest challenges when transitioning to a boarding school from a remote community in the Northern Territory?

Culture

Despite the successful transition and the encouragement of family, students still struggled when moving between the vastly different cultural settings of community and the boarding house. Students remarked on a loss of culture and connection to their community and land as a result of attending boarding school. They reflected on the tension caused by moving between two vastly different cultural environments in community and boarding school. This led to difficult choices for students to make in balancing the time needed in community for cultural reasons with the demands of secondary school. It also raises questions surrounding the negative, unintended consequences of boarding school.

Homesickness and boredom

Homesickness affected all students who were interviewed when transitioning to boarding school. Students described homesickness in a variety of ways which was most prominent when students were alone and new to the school. For many students the feelings of homesickness dissipated over time with the help of family and countrymen along with activities to distraction them from feeling homesick.

Students relationships with their family, community and land heightened their feelings of homesickness. One student missed the sense of place that he felt in community and certain songs would bring back memories of home which could result in homesickness. Students also noted that activities such as shopping and playing sport alleviated the homesickness which was more pronounced when students were bored and there were no planned activities in the boarding house. All students were at boarding school with countrymen,

indicating that the support of family and other students at boarding school could help successfully transitioning to boarding school.

Shame

Shame was an individual factor that emerged from the data as a sub theme. Students reflected on the different classroom practices which led to feelings of shame. Shame is a concept and feeling experienced by Aboriginal students that is linked to embarrassment about academic achievement and a fear of failure at school (Adermann & Campbell, 2007; Mander, 2012). Individualistic interactions in the classroom such as presenting and talking in front of a class led to greater feelings of shame as they differed with more communalistic structures such as sitting in a circle at the same level for class discussions.

The concept of shame can also go deeper than embarrassment, arising from any situation in which a person has been singled out for any reason including scolding, praise or any kind of attention in which a person loses the security and anonymity of a group (Harkins, 1990). Respondents in this study identified examples of shame from both praise for Student 3 regularly attending class to being the focus on attention in front of their peers in the classroom. This reinforces how shame is multifacted and risks adversely impacting academic engagement and achievement if the practice leads to a negative self-concept for the student (Mander, 2012).

Communication with family

The means of communication between students and family in remote communities was noted as a distinct challenge. One student explained that her community did not have mobile phone reception, requiring her to call the community pay phone to talk to family. The importance of family support during the transition to boarding school hinders an important support mechanism for students to successfully transition to boarding school (O'Bryan, 2016). Other studies reinforce this issue, particularly with the online shift to digital communication. Discussing communication with parents, O'Bryan (2016) notes that participants did not have regular access to the internet for school reports, newsletters and

other correspondence. The assumption that all parents have regular access to the internet particularly disadvantages Aboriginal parents of boarding students to keep engaged with the school. This increases the challenge of families of boarding students to maintain contact with both students and the broader school community.

Discussion of key findings

This section provides a more detailed discussion of the findings and how they relate to other literature on the topic. Literature surrounding the transition to boarding school for Aboriginal students from remote communities is emerging, along with Government recognition of the challenges faced with transition (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016; O'Bryan, 2016). The section is presented in the key themes which emerged in relation to the two research questions.

Family and Community

Parental agency and family support

Several students stated that influence from family members in their community and at school helped them transition. The role of parental education level and the language spoken at home can allow parents to be stronger advocates for their children (Guenther, Disbray, & Osborne, 2014). All of the students who participated in focus group discussions and interviews noted that their parents had attended boarding school, and some stated that their parents had completed Year 12. A related study drawing on My School and Census data by Guenther, et al. (2014) found that academic outcomes are indicators which are influenced by labour force participation, rates of English language spoken at home and higher proportions of training qualifications in the community. This reinforces the findings from the quantitative component of the study indicating the importance of language spoken at home and parent school year completed. These quantitative relationships require further examination with larger datasets across different schools and communities to determine if this correlation exists across a wider group of students.

A large scale data linkage project by Silburn, McKenzie, Guthridge, Li, and Li (2014) examined a range of publicly available records to show large scale relationships surrounding attendance and results national NAPLAN standardised tests. The study found that young mothers with low education levels could impact the academic performance of their children. The percentage of adults in the community with Year 12 education and the percentage of adults who speak English was also related to greater attendance and NAPLAN scores (Silburn et al., 2014). This study also indicates a relationship between parent education and English spoken at home. However, the metrics focusing on NAPLAN results and attendance and the lack of focus on boarding students means that a direct link to a successful transition to boarding school is limited. Similarly, (Guenther, Disbray, et al., 2015) in a qualitative study found that successful outcomes in remote education were family and community involvement.

During interviews students provided some insight into how family influences a successful transition to boarding school. Student 2 noted that his mother and father figures both finished school and detailed how they used their knowledge and experience to guide him through boarding school. His father figure gave advice when Student 2 was considering joining the police after school, discouraging him to do so because he himself had been a police officer. His mother also demonstrated strong advocacy and initiative when choosing a boarding school. According to Student 2, she chose the school because it had a positive reputation and was Christian.

The ability of a parent to advocate for their children in a western centric boarding school system can be explored through the idea of cultural capital (Benveniste et al., 2015; Bourdieu & Nice, 1977). Cultural capital is the knowledge and understanding of dominant culture and cultural cues which are preferentially valued in a school (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Examples of cultural capital within a school setting includes extracurricular classes and activities such as dance, art and attending museums. It can also include the human and material resources which parents provide to their children to enhance academic understanding (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). The impact of this on students from non-dominant cultures is a struggle to understand the underlying social cues, knowledge and skills that are necessary to succeed (Guenther & Bat, 2013).

Application of Critical Race Theory

The application of critical race theory to the themes and results that emerge from the data highlights a number of areas for consideration. This lens allows for examination of the results through the political and legal framework that represents the ideology of "Western" interests and the impact and legacy of colonialism (Vass, 2015). Critical race theory views boarding schools as a place where hidden curriculum exists in daily routines, programs and social relations formed by dominant group values, ideas and objectives (Benveniste et al., 2019). This includes classroom interactions, teacher and staff expectations and assumptions along with relationships between the boarding house and students' families and communities.

The patterns of interaction in the classroom reveal cultural differences between students' community and boarding school. Student 3 discussed the interactions within the classroom which operated under the assumptions of the dominant culture. When students share their learning, it is expected that they stand in front of the class to talk to students who are mostly strangers. Student 3 was initially reluctant to do this because their approach is to share in a circle on the same level. As teachers assess and judge students on their interactions and ability to present to peers it can create a disadvantage for boarding students. Teachers with greater understanding and cultural awareness can help implement classroom interactions which allow students to express knowledge and understanding in a culturally safe and understanding environment.

A case study by (Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017) focused the Gumbalanya community school in the Northern Territory as an example of Aborginal viewpoints and culture being authentically recognized and embedded within the Western curriculum. Along with two Principals, one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal, the school uses Aboriginal language and culture as a vehicle for learning English and mathematics (Gillan et al., 2017). The school also adapted its school year to match holiday breaks with the "dry" season in June-July when families travel to outstations and students are often absent from school. Some of these approaches and initiatives are less realistics and applicable to boarding schools

located in urban centres. However, the focus of a systemic system embedding Aboriginal worldviews and cultures into the whole school environment can be incorporated.

The rules, routines and structures within a boarding house can intentionally or unintentionally reinforce the cultural hegemony of a dominant group. A study by Benveniste et al. (2019) focused on how critical race theory can reveal how boarding school systems can reinforce dominant culture values. Using semi structured interviews, staff stressed the importance of rules and routines to ensure that the boarding house ran smoothly, noting how Aboriginal boarding students came from environments with limited rules (Benveniste et al., 2019). However as boarding staff seek to enforce rules and norms and conformity to make the boarding house run smoothly, it also risks reinforcing hegemony of the dominant group.

The influence of dominant culture within the boarding school experiences contribute to the construction of identity (Benveniste 2019). This highlights the importance for boarding staff to be reflexive and understanding in their practice to create safe spaces for a variety of learning approaches in different settings (Benveniste et al., 2019). Student 3 stressed how they *"just want to go back and start over again start learning about my culture and what I've missed when I was here."* The distinctly different cultural worlds between boarding school and community eroded away the students cultural identity leaving a sense of sadness and regret. This indicates that the stuctures and practices in the boarding house may have allowed the student to be successful in terms of western educational outcomes, yet came at the expense of cultural knowledge and learning. A rich boarding school experience would therefore acknowledge the interplay of different cultures in to develop shared experiences and understandings in which race based assumptions are questioned and challenged by staff, students and the broader community.

Boarding schools provide a vastly different cultural landscape for students to navigate. The ability of a parent and guardians to guide students through boarding school may be enhanced by their successful experiences in the school system and their ability to advocate for their child. Mander (2015) conducted in-depth interviews with 11 Aboriginal parents and guardians from Western Australia in which a major theme of Parental Agency emerged from

the data. All parents in the study emphasised the importance of staying connected with their child and the school to ensure a successful connection (Mander, 2015). Parents noted that understanding the challenges and experiences faced at boarding school can help with support and transition compared to other parents who have “spent all their lives in the bush” (Mander, 2015). The study also noted that parents developing strong relationships with boarding house staff was crucial to a successful transition for their child (Mander, 2015).

In a study examining the boarding experience for Aboriginal people throughout Australia O’Bryan (2016) spoke to parents who viewed themselves as advocates based on their prior experiences and exposure to boarding schools. Analysis of interview data revealed that alumni boarding students found the family-student relationship as central to student wellbeing (O’Bryan, 2016). These perspectives provide further evidence of how parents who speak English at home would have a greater ability to advocate for their child with a range of academic and boarding staff. The cultural capital built up by parents in their interactions with dominant western culture may assist future generations through increased agency to ensure that their child receives appropriate academic and pastoral support while attending boarding school.

Further research focused on parents from the Northern Territory focuses on the role of parents and the factors that help their children successfully transition to boarding school (Benveniste et al., 2019; Osborne et al., 2018). Boarding schools as a place where hidden curriculum exists in daily routines, programs and social relations formed by dominant group values, ideas and objectives (Benveniste et al., 2019). Parents interviewed by Benveniste et al. (2019) were actively engaged with their child’s schooling, expressing concern that students were listened to by boarding staff if they did not follow the rules. Parental awareness of the underlying rules and structures in a boarding house highlights an implicit understanding of how a boarding school operates, possibly through their own previous experience. This can help students make the shift between starkly different cultures and the underlying rules which dictate life in a boarding house.

Conversely students with limited or no family support can face significant challenges at boarding school. This can be due to constraints placed by distance and finances which prevent a parent or guardian visiting and being more active in their child's boarding school experience (Mander, 2012). Families can also struggle to support students due to cultural and language barriers. Interviews with parents by Mander (2012, p. 194) noted that some parents have "lived their whole lives in the bush" and struggle to grasp the enormity of change experienced by students moving to boarding school. The burden of paperwork and other unfamiliar Western school structures can impact on parents and guardians' confidence and ability to support their children transitioning to boarding school (Mander, 2012).

Guenther and colleagues' (2016) interviewed staff in a range of schools in remote communities and regional boarding schools in their investigation into the transition to boarding school. A major theme to emerge from the data was that many students and families did not have a realistic idea of what boarding school would be like. This can lead to shame in the community if students are expelled or asked to leave the community early (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016). Without support when moving in and out of boarding schools students risk "churning" through multiple boarding schools or risk becoming disengaged from formal schooling totally (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016). The study attributed some of this to representatives of boarding schools who sometimes make unrealistic promises to parents who are vulnerable due to their differing prior educational experience and a desire for the best possible education for their child (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016). Despite Aboriginal parents and guardians in remote communities wanting the best educational experiences for their students, there is some evidence that a lack of experience in Western schooling systems can hinder their ability to support and advocate for their child at boarding school (Osborne et al., 2018).

School

Teachers were an important school-based support mechanism for students, and some students noted that teachers in boarding school were more helpful. Encouragement provided by teachers helped students negotiate to challenging situations inside and outside

of the classroom. Student 3 credited teachers with a large role in changing her behaviour at school and encouraging her to regularly attend class and shape who she is today.

Qualities of a teacher that students related to were humour but strict with expectations and discipline. A study by Nelson and Hay (2010) showed that positive relationships with school staff and teachers significantly improved the transition experience. Recommended school level strategies to ensure a successful transition included acknowledging and being inclusive of a student's socially complex life world and value the cultural capital and life experiences that students bring to a school (Benveniste, Guenther, Dawson, & Rainbird, 2014; Nelson & Hay, 2010).

Teachers and school support staff can also provide motivation and encouragement to navigate through a culturally different environment. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1984) provides a cultural explanation to differences in educational outcomes. Studies found that working class students needed more persistence and ability than students from a favoured background to reach the same level of achievement (Bourdieu, 1984). This has led to a theory centred on the basis that cultural understandings that children from high status backgrounds have are similar to those which underlie the education system leading to an advantage (Bourdieu, 1984; Stobart, 2005). As teachers possess the cultural capital within the boarding school system, they can take on an important role in assisting students to transition from remote communities to a new school.

Independent Factors

Opportunities and Independence

Students remarked on the access to opportunities that boarding school provided as a key motivation and advantage of boarding school. They also noted how the experience provided a sense of independence from family and community which was important to them. The opportunities ranged from scholarships and support to travel and extracurricular activities. Being in Darwin had a wider range of extracurricular activities.

The importance of extra-curricular activities and opportunities at boarding school is highlighted in a similar context in South Australia (English & Guerin, 2017b). A study by English and Guerin (2017b) involving interviews with 31 female Aboriginal students at a residential college in Adelaide, South Australia focused on the transition experience when moving from remote communities. A residential school provides accommodation for boarding students who attend a range of secondary schools within a major city. A key theme to emerge from the data was that most students enjoyed the onsite and offsite activities and opportunities which were designed to allow students opportunities to engage with mainstream society. Students similarly noted that these experiences were not available in community. The authors noted that recreational activities such as shopping trips were shaped around building important life skills such as budgeting and returning faulty items (English & Guerin, 2017b).

Conversely, in this study the connections between extracurricular activities and real life problems was noted as a weak point. Student 2 reflected towards the end of the focus group discussion that boarding school has opportunities, but fails to teach practical life lessons like saving money and living independently. The lack of connections between what Student 2 perceives as opportunities for important learning and that of boarding school appear incongruent in this case. He has achieved success in moving to boarding school and in on track to complete Year 12. However, as a student who has attended boarding school for more than five years, his observations and reflections highlight a disconnect between what boarding school provides and what he perceives as important knowledge and skills for the future.

Scholarships and other support programs were in place at the boarding school. Student 3 was grateful for the support and connections that these provides, in contrast to Students 4 and 5 who saw little tangible benefit of holding an IYLP scholarship. Students who had a negative perception of scholarships stated that it "*Help you with homework and stuff."* (Student 4) *and "It's just dinners and that."* (Student 5). This could be related to gender differences and the different aspirations and post school goals for these students.

Across Australia female Aboriginal students are more likely to attain higher test scores and complete Year 12 than their male counterparts (Biddle & Cameron, 2012). There could be a range of factors involved including the differing traditional gender roles male and female students play in a community (Biddle & Cameron, 2012; O'Bryan, 2016). Student 3 was a female student who had worked hard to obtain an Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking (ATAR) to apply for university. She recognised the support of scholarships and other opportunities in her school to give her options. These options include "a*nother career change they can help me with that. Get into uni [university] and all that".* Students 4 and 5, both males were due to graduate with skills related certificates, but not seeking university studies straight after Year 12. Therefore the perceived benefits of the program may not have suited their circumstance to the same extent as Student 3.

A study into factors relating to Aboriginal educational outcomes by Biddle and Meehl (2016) found that that female students have to work harder to find acceptance or opportunities and less likely to engage with wider school community. Male Aboriginal students on the other hand were more likely to have positive peer relationships at school than female Aboriginal students. Reasons posited by the authors include more opportunities such as team sports in which male Aboriginal students can interact with a range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peers (Biddle & Meehl, 2016). The differing attitudes to scholarship programs between male and female respondents in the present study may relate to the broader support network at boarding school. Both male students played local club football and were a part of the well-resourced Clontarf program at the school. These connections and support from a range of areas may have led to the male students receiving less valuable support from their IYLP scholarship.

Homesickness

All students experienced homesickness, particularly when they first arrived at boarding school. Homesickness involves anxiety, distress and functional impairment resulting from the actual or anticipated separation from home or caregivers (Mander, 2012, p. p.27). This was described in a number of ways "*bit of sadness in your body. Feel like left out and feel lonely" (Student 1)*.

Students described strategies to cope with homesickness including friends, family and participating in a range of activities. Activities in the boarding school greatly contributed to alleviating homesickness *"It depends on what kind of activities they give you. Cause when I got home sick. We used to do these activities that made me get out of that you know."* (Student 3). Interviews with Aboriginal students from Western Australia conducted by Mander (2012) noted that students had a range of experiences in terms of duration, frequency and intensity. Strategies to help deal with homesickness included daily routines, keeping busy and talking to friends and family while having another student from the same family or community helped to cope with homesickness (Mander, 2012). This bears many similarities to comments from Student 2 and Student 3 when describing strategies to deal with homesickness such as hanging out with mates and watching footy to distract themselves.

Several other studies have found homesickness to be a large challenge faced by students transitioning to boarding school (Benveniste et al., 2015; Bobongie, 2017a; O'Bryan, 2016). Interviews conducted with 31 female residential school students in South Australia found similar concerns regarding homesickness (English and Guerin 2017). Similar to this study, the homesickness suffered by students subsided over time for many students. Students also used both countrymen and other students to teach them the structure and routines that helped to adjust to boarding school and cope with homesickness (Benveniste et al., 2015; O'Bryan, 2016).

Overall, many of the students expressed that they felt more homesick at the commencement of the program and that over time these feelings reduced. Despite this, some students indicated that homesickness remained, and subsequently felt that they needed to be kept occupied to distract themselves from these feelings.

Impact of boarding school on culture

The importance of culture on the health and well-being of Aboriginal people is well established throughout the world (Chandler et al., 2003; Kickett-Tucker, 2009). Many

communities speak multiple languages and dialects that intimately connect Aboriginal people to their land, history, family and future (Lee et al., 2014). The impact of boarding school was a prominent finding which emerged from the study and will be explored in this section.

In this study, several students remarked on a loss of culture and connection to their community and land as a result of attending boarding school. Student 3 reflected on the long period of time away from home and the efforts of her family to maintain her cultural knowledge. The importance is highlighted by her regular practice of going home and checking with her great grandmother what was happening and what she had missed.

Other students remarked on the tension caused by moving between two vastly different cultural environments in community and boarding school. This led to difficult choices for students to make in balancing the time needed in community for cultural reasons with the demands of secondary school. It also raises questions surrounding the negative, unintended consequences of boarding school such as mental ill-health, social distress, cultural loss, language loss, missed opportunities, criminal behaviours and identity confusion (Bobongie, 2017b; Guenther et al., 2017; O'Bryan, 2016). Other studies have found boarding school contributes to a lower sense of connection to peers and family who struggle to live successfully between "two worlds" (Guenther et al., 2017; O'Bryan, 2016; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2017).

This need to maintain culture and connections to community and land can lead to difficult choices when boarding school has presented a number of opportunities for work, study and travel. Other studies have noted the impact of boarding school on culture. A comprehensive study by O'Bryan (2012) includes case studies of students who return home after graduating Year 12 at a large boarding school. Respondents reflected on their need to "catch up on culture" and rectify the loss of language that they suffered while at boarding school. In contrast to this, several respondents faced pressure from schools to transition into higher education in the city. These challenging decisions are presented mainly after a student finishes Year 12.

Cultural practices can include a range of activities and ceremonies including dance, music, painting alongside spending time on country to learn about sacred sites and the interconnectedness of people (Mander, 2012). Stories and storytelling are used to pass on important information, learning and history which are often site specific, and can sometimes be only told at certain times by recognised custodians (Mander, 2012). The collection of cultural knowledge is a lifelong and continuous process in many communities. Moving to boarding school for multiple years can adversely interfere with Aboriginal students understanding of cultural knowledge and practices.

Other strategies have been noted by Mander (2015) that families use to ensure that their children maintain their culture and connection to land. Parents intentionally set field trips to family outstations when students returned to community for holiday breaks. Parents viewed these trips as powerful ways that their children can reaffirm their identity and connection to culture (Mander, 2015). Students in the study recognised efforts by family to ensure that they maintain a connection to culture.

Despite the challenges of being away from community, Student 3 was looking forward to starting over and learning her culture back in community after she graduates. However, this raises a question surrounding the impact of culture and the separation from family and community that prompts other students to leave boarding school and return home. Considering that the students identified in this study had successfully transitioned to boarding school, the impact on culture and their desire to return to community raises questions about whether the benefits of boarding school still outweigh the impact of removing a student from their land, family and culture.

Shifting between two cultures

The challenges associated with moving between cultures in community and boarding school were noted by many students. Many communities speak multiple languages and dialects that intimately connect Aboriginal people to their land, history, family and future (Lee et al., 2014). Students noted the tension moving between markedly different cultural settings when attending boarding school. Student 2 observed the close links to land that many

Aboriginal boarding students have. He contrasts this with people he interacts with in Darwin, who are comfortable moving away from their home for new opportunities. The focus on where a student is from and how this is an inescapable part of their identity is prominent.

Navigating the space between Aboriginal and western ways of knowing and thinking is also framed around the idea of a cultural interface (Nakata, 2007). Moving away from traditional dichotomies between western and Aboriginal knowledge systems, Nakata (2007) posits that Aboriginal people are entangled in a contested knowledge space, often involuntarily. The cultural interface is a complex area that includes the historical social and cultural impacts of colonialism (Nakata, 2007).

The connection to country is just one manifestation of how students have to navigate different cultural landscapes moving between community and boarding school. This tension can be viewed through the lens of collectivist versus individualistic social structures. The collectivist in many remote communities versus the individualistic structures present in western style schooling system. Traditional knowledge is held by different members within a society and revealed to young people at different stages of their lives. This contrasts with a Western view of knowledge where knowledge is rarely confined to different groups, and individuals can often own particular pieces of knowledge regardless of age or social status (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). The dominance of western ways of thinking in boarding school can lead to the questions around these cultural differences being uncontested (Nakata, 2003). Student 2 clearly outlines this tension through clear reflections on the difference between life in community and the city. This predominately revolves around sharing in community versus the need for money and independence to survive in the city.

With a limited knowledge base of Western cultural practices and customs to draw upon, many Aboriginal learners can be disadvantaged when faced with dominant Western educational structures and systems. As they work within the cultural interface between community and school their struggles can be manifested in “failures” in attendance, academic performance and engagement. In order to allow students to work through the cultural interface and be comfortable “walking in both worlds” schools and the broader

community need to examine their own culturally assumptions and practices and reflect on how they impact students moving to boarding school.

The impact of the dominant culture on students transition to boarding school is explored in other studies. O'Bryan (2016) notes the assumptions built into western education systems that home life is congruent with school life in terms of cultural values and priorities. When this occurs the personal and academic growth experienced by students is organic and integrated into all parts of their lives (O'Bryan, 2016). For many boarding students coming from distinctly different home lives in terms of language, beliefs, values and family structures makes it a challenge to fit into the norms and values of boarding school. The focus on personal academic achievement and growth can prove challenging to students when this clashes with values placed on collectivist social structures such as kinship, understanding of history, language and the role of place (O'Bryan, 2016). To successfully transition to boarding school, students (and their families) have to negotiate and balance the value and benefits of western educational systems with the cultural norms, responsibilities and attitudes that are valued by community. When students are unable to see the value of western schooling within the framework of home and family life it can lead to disengagement and in some cases can be the reasons why students eventually drop out of school.

Viewing the movement between community and boarding school through the lens of a cultural interface highlights the tension that students experience between their cultural knowledge and values and the dominant cultural beliefs that are an inescapable part of their lives (Nakata, 2007). Within this study, students who had existing links and experiences within Western culture expressed more confidence negotiating the cultural interface. Student 4 was more confident navigating between these cultural spaces due to a strong grounding in language and culture from his community in the Northern Territory. This confidence was echoed in his response to questions about whether he misses learning language and his confidence in that he already knows it.

Parent and family support have been highlighted in this thesis as an important aspect of a successful transition to boarding school. The experience of Student 4 living in Darwin with

family could help him gain confidence to help him navigate the cultural interface between community and boarding school. Other students who experienced a more radical shift of moving directly from community to boarding school may be less prepared to deal with the cultural interface and therefore struggle in the transition and ultimately may even return home from boarding school.

Other examples of negotiating a "third space" between cultures occur in other settings (Todd, 2018). The Baldja Conceptual model was developed in recognition of cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff in the civil construction industry (Todd, 2018). Noting cultural differences between Aboriginal and Western worldviews it proposes to develop a third space through a process of developing a shared understanding while concurrently avoiding practices and behaviours which can hamper the development of a shared understanding (Todd, 2018). The creation of a third space hinges on developing a strong understanding and awareness of different cultural backgrounds (Todd, 2018). It involves a continual cycle of learning, feedback, affective actions and understanding and questioning to develop greater understanding of different cultures to create a shared "third space". As Aboriginal boarding school students make a geographical and cultural transition from remote communities to boarding school, developing a shared understanding between students, families, staff and the broader community could help to reduce challenges faced by students as they transition.

Significance of the study

This thesis makes an important contribution to the literature about the factors influencing a successful transition for Aboriginal students entering boarding school in the Northern Territory (NT). It is significant on a number of levels. The study focuses on students thoughts, reflections and experiences on the transition to boarding school from remote communities in the NT. The NT has highest proportion of Aboriginal people living in remote areas across all states and territories. Addressing the concerns, needs and aspirations of these students will be an ongoing issue for schools and broader educational bodies to deal with. The study also gave an important opportunity for students to voice their opinions, thoughts and reflections regarding the boarding experience at their school. These

opportunities can in time develop their agency and ability to use their voice and opinion to create positive change throughout the schooling and beyond.

There is a large body of research which has emerged in recent years focused on the boarding school experience in Australia (Benveniste, 2018; Benveniste et al., 2019; Bobongie, 2017b; Guenther et al., 2017; Guerin & Pertl, 2017; Mander et al., 2015a; O'Bryan, 2016; Osborne et al., 2018). Several studies are materialising that investigate the boarding school experience through interviews with students, but there is limited student voice from the Northern Territory. The lack of detailed research surrounding a successful transition to boarding school and the experiences of students adds to the significance of the study. Using student voices to examine the key influences on a successful transition to boarding school provides a unique and important contribution to the literature.

This study is one of the first to employ the voices, thoughts and reflections of current boarding students in the Northern Territory. Some studies have focused on different jurisdictions such as Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and Queensland. Other studies have focused on parents, school staff and other stakeholders in the NT (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2014; Osborne et al., 2018) or include former students from the NT in the context of a larger study (O'Bryan, 2016). Providing student voices, thoughts, reflections and ideas from across Australia helps build a case that can contribute to a more successful, meaningful and empowering experience when moving to boarding school.

Finally, this study provides an important opportunity for students from the school to voice their opinions to affect change. This echoes a study conducted by O'Bryan (2016) who conducted a large number of interviews across Australia to inform, and through this transform the ways that mainstream boarding schools provide educational opportunities for Aboriginal young people. It reflects the importance in education of providing young people opportunities to be a critically engaged agent and alert to his or her own civic rights and responsibilities (Smith, 2003). This study is confined to a single school, but the reflections and voice of the students will be fed back into all areas of the school to highlight areas of improvement and concurrently identify strengths. Participants were also part of representative councils in the boarding houses and wider school community. Participation

in critical discussions can prompt further reflection and result in greater student autonomy and voice throughout the school.

Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations to improve our knowledge of this area and affect positive change for students throughout the boarding school experience. These include the methodological changes that could provide greater scope and depth to future studies in this area.

The quantitative results indicate a potential relationships between parental support, prior education and language spoken at home. The exploratory nature of the study means that these findings cannot be generalized outside of the focus school. But the findings support a lot of previous work in this field. Speaking with a greater number of students across a number of schools could provide a body of evidence that can inform teachers, families, schools, communities, government and other stakeholders on the broader trends. In particular, there is a lack of clarity in government policy in the area of boarding schools at a Federal, State and Territory level (Guenther et al., 2017). More quantitative data across a number of schools could also point to trends emerging at a family, community and individual level that can give indications for a successful transition to boarding school.

The sampling approach could be improved with a greater sample size. Acceptance into the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) was used as a proxy for success in this study. However the nature of this program means that some selection bias could occur. A greater number of data from students could allow for more randomized sampling strategy.

Results from the quantitative data analysis alongside comments from the students indicated that family members play an important role in a students' successful transition to boarding school. They indicated that the parent or guardian education level and whether they speak English at home correlate positively with a successful transition. Greater insight into the roles that parents and broader family networks supporting students transitioning to boarding school would be beneficial, particularly in the Northern Territory. Talking to

parents and guardians to explore how their previous educational experiences and other factors influences the way in which they support their children could provide some important insights to aid the transition process. Parent and guardian insights could be empowering for individuals and communities to reflect on the challenges faced by children transitioning to boarding school.

The influence of racism on the boarding school experience did not arise as a theme or sub theme throughout the interviews despite it being a prominent aspect in other studies (Benveniste et al., 2019; Mander, 2012; O'Bryan, 2016). The approach of using semi structured interviews and focus groups with secondary age students could have led to a reluctance to discuss this issue. An alternative approach to consider in future studies is yarning (story telling). This method is employed in a number of studies as a more culturally accessible method of gaining insight into the thoughts and experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). This approach could have yielded more insights from students and explored areas that were more challenging for them to engage with.

Opportunities for future research

As an exploratory study, this research has opened up a number of avenues and areas for further research on the transition to boarding school for Aboriginal secondary students in the Northern Territory. Suggestions discussed below include incorporating the voices of parents and community members, obtaining a larger sample size of students for both qualitative and quantitative components, improved criterion of success, and further research on the role of countrymen in helping with the transition experience from remote communities to boarding school.

Throughout the study the prominent role of parents and community members to support and ensure a successful transition is apparent. The quantitative analysis suggests that parent and guardian education level and whether English is the main language spoken at home corresponds with students being accepted into the IYLP program. Furthermore, the role of parents in providing support and motivation was a strong theme emerging from student interviews and focus group discussions. There is a growing body of research in this

area, exploring parent perceptions of students in South Australia (Benveniste, Dawson, Guenther, Rainbird, & King, 2016), Central Australia (Osborne & Guenther, 2013) and nationally (O'Bryan, 2016). These need further investigation to provide a stronger voice for students, families and communities to advocate for the best educational outcomes for their children.

A larger sample size of students would provide a number of advantages. Firstly, more student voices provide more balance to the broader debates and policies surrounding boarding school provision for Aboriginal students from remote communities across Australia. A greater number of students participating in discussions and interviews could also lead to broader themes emerging about the factors which enable students to successfully transition to boarding school along with the challenges which accompany this. In terms of quantitative data, a larger cohort of census data from a range of schools can identify broader trends and relationships between successful transitions and a range of individual, family and community factors. This provides another dataset to help schools, communities and other stakeholders gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of boarding school and some of the potential influences which can improve the ability of students to successfully move to boarding school.

This study defined a successful transition to boarding school through broader parameters than academic achievement and school completion. Acceptance into the IYLP program requires students to complete written statements and interviews along with teacher and staff recommendations. It encompasses a range of criteria such as attendance, attitude, achievement and leadership. Similar measures of success are important to frame studies in this area. A number of previous studies have identified the dominant culture frequently contains views on success in Aboriginal education focusing on basic literacy and numeracy skills, attendance and Year 12 completion (Benveniste et al., 2016; Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016; Mander, 2012; O'Bryan, 2016). The lack of breadth in these parameters is at odds with the views of Aboriginal parents and elders in remote communities. Educational success for Aboriginal students should be broader than achievement or completion to reflect aims found within broader educational philosophies and within communities themselves (O'Bryan, 2016; Osborne & Guenther, 2013).

A study of the aspirations and definitions of success from the perspective of Aboriginal parents in remote communities raised a number of interesting points (Osborne & Guenther, 2013). Interviews with 347 remote Aboriginal respondents found the main aspirations identified for the education of young people from remote communities were maintaining connection to land, language and culture, ensuring young people have strong local identity and can find meaningful employment (Osborne & Guenther, 2013). When these parents were asked what their perception of educational success is the top responses were parental involvement and role modelling, academic skills (being able to read and write in English) and community engagement.

Other studies identified successful outcomes as developing skills for active citizenship and young people who are critically engaged agents in their own world (Brendtro & Van Bockern, 2005; Nussbaum, 2010). Future studies could examine other parameters for defining success which incorporates the understanding of walking between cultures maintaining language and ties to land and becoming active citizens within a range of contexts. Matching the aspirations and goals of parents, students and communities into definition and parameters of success can lead to studies which seek to explain and remedy more than the issues of poor attendance, Year 12 and literacy and numeracy skills.

This study focused on students who achieved a successful transition. Gaining a deeper understanding of the reasons why students leave or drop out of boarding school is equally important. There is some uncertainty surrounding the number of students transitioning in and out of boarding, along with data on how long they remain at a boarding school (Guenther, Milgate, et al., 2016). Students who are expelled from school also risk a complete disengagement from education, with limited options to support students in community (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b). Additionally, ABSTUDY data indicates that rate of expulsions for boarding students accessing funding has increased steadily since 2011 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017b). This risk of students becoming disengaged from education has far reaching impacts on the individual, their family, the wider community and broader society. This makes it imperative that more research identifies the drivers behind this from the voices of students themselves.

Conclusion

Boarding school has been and continues to be an important stage in the educational experiences of Aboriginal people living in remote communities in the Northern Territory. The experience of moving away from family, land and community presents many challenges for students in transitioning to boarding school and managing the dramatic transition between two vastly different cultures. This study has identified students who have successfully managed the transition to boarding school from remote communities as demonstrated positive role modelling for other students, academic achievement, consistent attendance and demonstrated leadership within the boarding house and wider school community. The findings indicate that students rely on support and resilience inherited from their family and wider community to successfully transition to boarding. In particular, support and encouragement from family in community and a range of staff in the school helped students overcome challenges such as cultural barriers and homesickness. This support was characterised by its consistency, tenacity and perseverance through setbacks and challenges. Students also recognised a range of opportunities presented at boarding school and recognised and appreciated the benefits they bring.

The study raises a number of key areas for further interrogation. While a range of factors have been identified in this study, the complexity inherent in this area means that they cannot form a checklist or guide to successful transition. There are many options and models of boarding schools throughout Australia that offer different attractions, services, opportunities and resultant challenges. Within the same families, with the same parental and family support some students successfully transition to boarding school while others struggle. This means that the transition experience is a complicated and complex process with a range of drivers. A set of prescribed individual, family and community factors does not result in a successful transition. There is also a large cohort of Aboriginal students from remote communities who do not have a positive, successful transition to boarding school (Walker, 2019). In the best cases these students may end up successfully continuing their education back in community or at another boarding school. At worst they become disengaged from schooling entirely. This highlight an urgency to understand the issues and

challenges presented during the transition of Aboriginal students to boarding school in the Northern Territory. This study has presented and analysed student thoughts, experiences and reflections on the transition to boarding school. With more student voices, perhaps the complex nature of what makes a successful transition to boarding school will become clearer for everyone involved.

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Appendix 1

Guiding Questions for Focus Group Discussion

SCHOOL BASED

What things do you like most about school?

What do you find most challenging?

Which people help you the most at school? What do they do to help you?

Think about students that do well in boarding school? What things do you need to do well?

How could the school make things better?

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY BASED

Where was your last school? How was is similar or different to this school?

What helped you do well at school compared to other students?

Has anyone in your family or community been to university?

What do your family members tell you about boarding school?

How do family members support you at boarding school?

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

What do you do when something at school or in class is hard or challenging?

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

What are your goals for the future?