Service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions, and cultural awareness of Aboriginal Education

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Abstract

This research explored service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ pedagogical literacy skills and cultural perceptions with regard to Aboriginal education through involvement in an Aboriginal educational setting. The purpose was for pre-service teachers to gain a better understanding of Aboriginal education whilst developing their own literacy knowledge and instructional skills. Service-learning was the teaching method chosen as it involves experiential learning with structured opportunities for critical thinking and reflection.

A qualitative approach was favoured whereby investigations occurred in a naturalistic setting. As such, the direct experiences of pre-service teachers formed the basis of data gathering and analysis. Field notes provided extra information for the purpose of better understanding the process experienced by pre-service teachers. The approach was fundamentally phenomenological in nature in that pre-service teachers’ attitude, knowledge and pedagogy of Aboriginal education prior to, during and at the completion of a teaching experience within an Aboriginal educational setting, was explored in an ideographic fashion.

During the teaching session, pre-service teachers assessed, planned and tutored Aboriginal students for two hours per week for ten weeks, and then participated in a service-learning tutorial on site for one hour after each tutoring session. Data were collected using observations, interviews and reflective journals. Analysis of the data enabled the researcher to identify the impact of the service-learning experience on pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions, cultural awareness and pedagogy of Aboriginal education. At the heart of the experience was the building of relationships that became the catalyst for change in the pre-service teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of Aboriginal people. The self-efficacy and identity of the pre-service teachers as
effective teachers of Aboriginal students also increased throughout the experience. It is hoped that the research will provide further insight into how service-learning can be used as a pedagogical strategy within a teaching course enabling pre-service teachers to be better prepared and culturally competent to address the needs of Aboriginal students and help to Close the Gap (Australian Government, 2013).
Statement of Sources

The Thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the Thesis. It contains no work which has previously been presented for an award of the University or any other educational institution.

Signed:  G.B Cain       Date:  23/03/2014
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CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH DEFINED

1.0 Introduction to the research

As Professor Mike Dodson accepted his honorary doctorate from the University of Canberra he reflected on the state of Aboriginal education in Australia, “Our greatest challenge is not to fail another generation of Indigenous children. … Our greatest opportunity lies in those children and young adults, in their energy and their aspirations”. Dodson acknowledges, “It was never an easy task but shame is not in failing, it’s in not trying as hard or as intelligently as we can … yet we still can’t do it” (2010, para. 44). The issues related to Aboriginal education are the same as they have been for decades. Dodson calls for an approach to education where there are high expectations of Aboriginal students, with respect for their perspectives and attitudes. He believes that many Indigenous families still have a “living memory of education as an instrument of disempowerment: dismantling languages, culture and traditions. A place generally that fostered a culture of low expectations of their kids” (2010, para. 13).

The challenge, according to Dodson (2010), is to create an environment and educational system “that genuinely connects with the lives of Indigenous people ... The starting point must be to envision Indigenous children with intelligence, imagination, culture and values, desires and expectations for their lives” (para. 35). Aboriginal students must be imbued with a vision of achieving to their highest potential, whilst being proud of their identity and culture. Professor Dodson strongly urged that any approaches to improving the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students must begin at a community level, and encapsulate individual, social and cultural experiences with “respect for human rights and the humanity of all” (2010, para. 44).
If the message from Dodson is to be enacted, then there must be a coming together of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for the sake of the Indigenous future. In particular, those involved in education at all levels must continue to work towards connecting with the Aboriginal culture and make achievement in educational outcomes a reality. In the words of the Chairman of the Cape York Group (CYG), Noel Pearson, “… every Aboriginal child must be attending school … the fact closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage requires a long-term effort … should not blind us to the fact some of the challenges are relatively simple … and can be closed promptly” (2009, p.1). As Blackwell wrote, “There is no excuse not to provide Indigenous children with the best education possible” (2010, p. 3).

How can the challenges of improving Aboriginal educational outcomes be addressed? The views of Dodson are reflected in much of the literature. As Partington states, “No simple solution exists” (2005, p. 4). The problem is complex, with many factors contributing to the disadvantage suffered by so many Aboriginal people within Australian society. As purported by Hunter (cited in Hyde, Carpenter & Conway, 2010), the cycle of severe poverty and disadvantage will not be broken, unless the issue of education is tackled. Education has long been acknowledged by numerous reports as the key to improved Indigenous outcomes in society (Final report of the national evaluation of National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST], 2003; Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme, DEST, 2001; National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, DEST, 2000). Yet the question must be debated: What difference has the investment in education in the past made to improve Aboriginal participation in society? As Partington (2005) concluded:
Despite the statements of politicians and public officials...the situation remains largely unchanged from one decade to the next. Education is typical of the slowness to change: Progress has been limited and the problems experienced by Indigenous students in schools today are similar to those experienced a generation ago (p. 4).

Furthermore, Partington (2005) argued that improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students will not be made until there is a significant change in the mindset of those in control of administrating and delivering educational programs for Aboriginal students. As reiterated in the writings of Aird and Staples (2012), “It is pointless to repeat the failed policies of the past. It is time for dissonant change with an alternative vision” (p. 16). Aboriginal students can be easily marginalised by schools and teachers if there is a lack of awareness, sensitivity and cultural understanding. It has been reported by Aboriginal students that teachers “are more alert to potential infractions by them than other students”, with such widespread negative perception resulting in suspicion, mistrust and alienation (Partington, 2005, p. 4). If this is the attitude of some educators, then the challenges for Aboriginal students in the classroom are significant.

More recent work by Partington and Beresford (2012) acknowledged that there had been some improvement in the education of Aboriginal students with more students “completing high school and gaining post-school qualifications” (p. 35). However, there is still a disproportionate number of Aboriginal students who are not engaging with education and achieving basic educational milestones. These findings are also evidenced in the report from the Justice Commissioner and National Race Discrimination Commissioner at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Tom Calma, who stresses the importance of education:

Education prepares us to make decent and proper choices. It is fundamental to the development of human potential and to full participation in a democratic society. It is fundamental to the full enjoyment of most other human rights most clearly
the right to work but also the right to health. Most Indigenous children are fundamentally disengaged from education (2008, para.18).

Giroux (cited in Hyde et al., 2010) advocated an “approach to learning not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but also as the production of cultural practices that offer students a sense of identity, place and hope” (p. 76). Thus it is argued here that a starting point for success in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students begins with the relationships between the school, teachers, students and community. If a teacher does not have an understanding and awareness of Aboriginal culture, how will that teacher be able to build a relationship with the student? It is disturbing to read in the literature of the views expressed by a number of authors related to Aboriginal students’ experiences.

A significant barrier for Aboriginal students is an unsupportive teacher. ... Many teachers lack knowledge about the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and may have low and/or negative expectations due to stereotyping Aboriginal students and ignoring actual values and culture. ... For most Aboriginal students the relationship with teachers was largely a negative one: teachers lacked training in Aboriginal Studies and knew little about the ways in which Aboriginal students differed from other students (Hyde et al., 2010, p. 73).

In the study that examined the reactions of teachers to Aboriginal students, it was concluded that “the importance of the teacher is the foremost facet of any critique of Aboriginal education” (Partington, 2005, p. 113). Furthermore, Malin (1995) concluded that “… teachers put on hold, as far as possible, pre-conceived notions of student ability, personality based on first impressions of their appearance, ethnicity, gender, social class and so on” (ibid, p. 85). Teachers have a “vital role to play in the struggle for social justice by empowering students to both understand and address Aboriginal issues” (Byrne & Munns, 2003, p. 304).
It is vital that educators examine ways of empowering teachers to work with Aboriginal students to enable positive learning outcomes. The implications for teacher education are significant. In the words of Hattie (2009), “the current mantra, that teachers make the difference, is misleading. Not all teachers are effective, not all teachers are experts and not all teachers have powerful effects on students” (p. 108). How can pre-service teachers develop their knowledge, skills and understandings to teach Aboriginal students effectively unless they have the opportunity to interact with Aboriginal students? Is service-learning part of the answer to enable pre-service teachers to be better prepared to teach Aboriginal students?

Service-learning is both a methodology and pedagogy of learning that is considered relevant and pertinent to higher education generally and in particular, pre-service teacher education. As identified by Weigert (1998) “first, there is a joy that academic service-learning provides ... that contributes to the renewal of the love of teaching that draws so many into higher education” (p. 9). Second, continues Weigert, it helps teachers and students feel that they are “making a difference” together and to the world. Third, as the area of service-learning is evolving, “those who enter it have the opportunity to contribute to its development”. Finally, service-learning is a means of “thinking and responding in new, collaborative ways to the critical issues that confront our local and global worlds” (Weigert, 1998, p. 9). The researcher chose to explore the notion of service-learning as a strategy for developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education after viewing the impact of such a service-learning experience.
1.1 Impetus for the study

In 2010, a pilot study was conducted through The University of Notre Dame Australia, School of Education undergraduate course, whereby early childhood and primary pre-service teachers participated in a diagnostic literacy clinic within a service-learning context, at an Aboriginal secondary college. The concept of a pilot study was the result of an approach from the Principal of the Aboriginal College to the Dean of the School of Education seeking assistance in addressing the low literacy levels of the secondary students attending the college. In response to this request for literacy support, the decision was made to trial a service-learning intervention program involving pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers training in both early childhood and primary education were invited to participate in the pilot study. These pre-service teachers were in their third year of the degree and had completed three units specifically focussed on literacy teaching. They had also experienced over twenty weeks of classroom teaching through school practicum placements and thus were deemed by the university staff to be competent in literacy teaching. It was acknowledged that the pre-service teachers would be working in a secondary college setting, however as the pilot study was voluntary, and university staff would be on site for mentoring and support, any concerns could be immediately addressed. Thus an elective unit termed *Diagnostic literacy clinic within a service-learning context* was developed, based on the principles of service-learning and literacy pedagogy.

Twenty four pre-service teachers participated in the pilot unit of study. Data were collected during the experience through interviews, a learning log, reflective journal, class presentations and observational feedback. In analysing the experience from the pre-service teachers’ perspectives it became apparent that the service-learning opportunity had influenced the perceptions, knowledge and attitudes of the pre-service
teachers related to the education of Aboriginal students. Such a rich, unique, and authentic learning experience had a significant effect on the pre-service teachers who participated and the researcher who observed the responses of the pre-service teachers and Aboriginal students. Consequently, the impetus for a more formal research study to explore further how service-learning could develop pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions, and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education was born. A different group of pre-service teachers than those involved in the pilot study were recruited for the study proper.

1.2 Service-learning

Service-learning is viewed as a methodology and pedagogy that promotes personal and professional learning and is defined as “… experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5). The focus of the investigation was on service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. As defined by Lavery and Hackett (2008):

Service-learning is a teaching method, which combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs involve students in organised community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community (p. 19).

What impact does a service-learning model of teaching have on pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, as they are exposed to an Aboriginal educational setting? In an attempt to answer this question, this study aims to explore the phenomenon of service-learning through the
experiences of twenty four pre-service teachers as they engage with students at an Aboriginal college over a ten week period.

1.3 Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research was to explore service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ perceptions with regard to Aboriginal education through involvement in an Aboriginal educational setting. A phenomenological approach was chosen as the methodology as it best served the purpose of the research. The pre-service teachers’ attitude, knowledge and pedagogy of Aboriginal education prior to, during and at the completion of the teaching experience at the Aboriginal college, was designed to provide greater insight into service-learning as a way of addressing the learning needs of pre-service teachers in teaching Aboriginal students.

Service-learning was the teaching method and pedagogy chosen as this involves experiential learning with structured opportunities for critical thinking and reflection. Through academic service-learning, the focus of the experience was on addressing the literacy needs of the students as identified by the Aboriginal College; the pre-service teachers’ pedagogy of literacy teaching; and the reciprocity of the experience. The pre-service teachers participated in a diagnostic literacy clinic within a service learning context, working with students at the Aboriginal College. During the diagnostic literacy clinic, the pre-service teachers assessed, planned and tutored Aboriginal students for two hours per week for ten weeks. The pre-service teachers were paired with the Aboriginal students, to help create a supportive, collaborative learning environment. As the tutoring situation was new to both the Aboriginal students and pre-service teachers, it was deemed important that pairing students would assist in promoting a more interactive and relaxed context for learning. After each tutoring session, a service
learning tutorial was conducted on site for one hour, facilitated by university staff. Data were collected on the pre-service teachers’ attitude, knowledge and pedagogy of Aboriginal education throughout the experience. The data were examined and analysed to assess the essence and influence of the service-learning experience on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education.

1.4 Research questions

Four research questions framed the study of service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Each research question focused on a specific area of study related to the service-learning experience:

1. How does participation in a service-learning experience impact on the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development?
2. How does pre-service teachers’ knowledge of Aboriginal culture develop through exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting?
3. What do pre-service teachers learn about literacy pedagogy as it applies to an Aboriginal context?
4. What do the educational providers perceive as the benefits of the pre-service teachers’ input?

Definitions

The following terms are defined according to their usage in the present research study.

Aboriginal person: “An Aboriginal person is someone who is of Aboriginal descent, identifies as being Aboriginal and is accepted as such by an Aboriginal community” (Price, 2012, p. 193).
Aboriginal educational setting/Aboriginal college: A metropolitan secondary college for Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal education/ Indigenous education: these terms are used interchangeably throughout the thesis in reference to the teaching and learning of students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Cultural awareness: understanding and appreciation of the aspects of Aboriginal traditions, practices and ways of being.

Cultural competence: “a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural settings” (Tong & Cross, 2010, p. 21).

Indigenous Australians: referring to both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia. The term ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aboriginal’ are used throughout the thesis and assume a common meaning. It is acknowledged that this is not necessarily appropriate for all contexts.

Educational providers: staff participating in the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College.

Literacy pedagogy: knowledge, understanding and rationale of teaching essential for being literate in language learning.

Personal development: relating to the attributes, perceptions, talents and potential of the individual.

Professional development: knowledge, understanding and growth in education and teaching.

Pre-service teachers: undergraduate students studying to be primary and early childhood teachers through a Bachelor of Education course of study.

Service-learning: “Experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities
intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5).

1.5 Context of the research

Accreditation of teacher education courses demand that universities provide evidence of the extent to which the National Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011) are met. A review of the many government policies related to Aboriginal education highlights the urgent need for strategies to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. The National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) has a significant and key role to play in stressing the importance of competence in Aboriginal education both for a graduating teacher and the tertiary course providers. Thus the context for engaging in research that may inform future teacher education courses in Aboriginal education was explored. Accordingly, this research study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education will explore the impact of such an experience on the pre-service teacher participants. A significant outcome maybe that progress towards the achievement of the Graduate Teacher Standards, a part of the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) maybe demonstrated through such participation.

1.6 The conceptual framework

There are four key components within the conceptual framework relevant to the investigation into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education (Figure 1.1). At the centre of the framework is the development of the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, skills and understandings related to Aboriginal education. The components of service-
learning, Aboriginal cultural awareness and literacy pedagogy as applied to Aboriginal education are outcomes of the experience of exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting. A further outcome of the investigation, relates to the educational providers’ perceptions of the service-learning experience as to the impact of the pre-service teachers’ intervention, in tutoring the Aboriginal students.

![Figure 1](image)

*Figure 1* At the centre of the framework is the development of the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, skills and understandings related to Aboriginal education. The components of service-learning, Aboriginal cultural awareness and literacy pedagogy are outcomes of the experience. A further outcome of the investigation, relates to the perceptions of the educational providers. The total experience will have an impact on the achievement of the Graduate Teacher Competencies.

Graduate teacher competence was addressed through the experience, in areas of cultural diversity, Aboriginal teaching, content and pedagogy of literacy teaching. Thus the four components that equate to the research questions, include pre-service teachers’

1. personal and professional development through the service-learning experience;
2. perceptions and knowledge of cultural awareness;
3. pedagogy of Aboriginal literacy education; and
4. perceived benefits of the pre-service teachers’ input by the educational providers.
1.7 Significance of the research

The investigation into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ perceptions, knowledge and cultural awareness related to Aboriginal education is significant as it informs the effectiveness of exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting as a means of developing pre-service teachers’ competence. Given that the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) explicitly demand competence in this area, it is important that pre-service teacher education programs are effective in developing these skills and knowledge associated with Aboriginal education. As stated in the Review of Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-2008 (Unaipon, 2009),

It is exceedingly important to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to do so we must improve the graduate attributes of our teachers. Australian teachers, on leaving teacher education institutions, must be culturally competent. We, as a total population, depend on teachers for the skills we attain, the knowledge we gain and attitudes we cultivate over the years of schooling. By working with pre-service teachers with these three components of cultural competency in mind, we can do the very best to change student outcomes (p. 57).

More recently, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education action plan 2010-2014 (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), built on the national commitment to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through proposing to improve teacher quality. Supporting such a thrust, the focus of the present investigation was on how a service-learning model of personal and professional learning developed pre-service teachers’ competence in Aboriginal education, through exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting. As such, the investigation should inform the research on service learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ competence, thus informing pre-service teacher education courses of study, specifically related to
Aboriginal education. The resolve of pre-service teachers may be strengthened through the service-learning experience to explore the opportunities that arise in teaching Aboriginal students, in local, rural and remote locations, developing their confidence and competence to help ‘close the gap’ for Aboriginal education.

1.8 Limitations of the study

It is acknowledged that there are a number of limitations to the study of service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. First, the study was conducted on only one educational site and thus may not be representative of all educational settings. Second, the study was limited to a ten week time span. A longitudinal study would be beneficial to determine the long term influence of the service-learning experience on the pre-service teachers. Third, the significance of the phenomenon on the Aboriginal students was limited to the interviewing of three educational providers. Further research that documents the achievement of the Aboriginal students would be beneficial to strengthen the evidence of service-learning on the educational outcomes of the Aboriginal students. Finally, the study was limited to the qualitative analysis of the data to determine the significance of the service-learning experience of twenty-four participants from one university. A larger cohort of pre-service teachers could be studied to enable a greater cross-section of responses and outcomes. Further research using mixed methods may strengthen the evidence base of the impact of service-learning on the cultural competence, literacy pedagogy and instructional strategies of the pre-service teachers.
1.9 Thesis structure overview

The thesis is structured along the lines articulated below.

Chapter One: Introduction

The context for the study is introduced through Chapter One with background information provided as to the rationale, purpose, impetus for the study and research questions. The conceptual framework is described and significance of the study outlined. Limitations of the study are outlined and discussed.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

A review of literature relevant to the research study is presented. Six critical areas were informed in the conceptual framework of the study: Aboriginal Education; Service-learning; Cultural awareness; and, the pedagogy of Aboriginal literacy education. These areas form the framework of the literature review with a brief overview of key government documents relevant to the current educational context; and the Graduate Teacher Competencies.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The epistemology of qualitative research is discussed in Chapter Three. The theoretical approach undertaken holds to a social constructivist view, and is congruent with a phenomenological study. All aspects of the methodology are outlined in context to the research study into service-learning as way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perception and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is outlined and used to guide the data analysis and interpretation.
Chapter Four: Results

The results of the data collected during the service-learning experience are presented in Chapter Four and address the four research questions that are the focus of the study. Data were collected on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education prior, during and at the conclusion of the experience. These results are presented using the structure of the research questions and the three distinct forms of data collection: pre-experience interviews, reflective journals completed during the phenomena, and post-experience interviews. Field notes taken by the researcher throughout the study are used to support the results of the service-learning experience and research journal to aid in bracketing and epoche of interpretations (Bednall, 2006).

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter Five presents the findings of the research into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. The four research questions have framed the discussion with current literature interwoven and informing the outcomes of the research study. Research question one elicited the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development throughout the experience. Research question two focused on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge of Aboriginal culture. In addressing research question three six key concepts were identified. These included the importance of being literate; pedagogy of literacy teaching and learning; assessment; instructional strategies; curriculum content; and the integration of literacy learning. The final research question sought to elicit the perspectives of the educational providers as to the impact of the pre-service teachers working with the Aboriginal students.
Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter Six presents the conclusions and recommendations of the research study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. The final chapter also outlines suggestions for further research. A personal impact statement concludes the thesis.

1.10 Personal statement

The words of Gollan and Malin (2012) challenge those in teacher education. “It is time for teachers to evaluate the appropriateness of their teaching programs rather than looking at the deficits in the Aboriginal child or their family” (Gollan & Malin, 2012, p. 172). “Where will Aboriginal children be in ten years’ time? … Future teaching graduates need to graduate with a commitment to work in a way that creates opportunities for young Aboriginal people’s experiences in the classroom, creating a place that is culturally safe and inclusive” (p. 173). All children deserve to be taught by the very best teachers. If pre-service teachers have never met or conversed with an Aboriginal person how can they be expected to develop a “culturally responsive curriculum”? The researcher was keen to explore the outcomes of the service-learning experience of connecting face to face with Aboriginal people and the impact it may have on pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

The investigation into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education demands a review of literature in six critical areas as identified in Figure 2.1. The key areas of review include: Australian Government Educational Policies; Aboriginal Education; Cultural awareness; Pedagogy of literacy education and Service-learning. The Australian *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011) are also a significant document referenced in the research study and literature review. These standards outline the *Graduate teacher competences* expected of pre-service teachers on completion of their degree.

*Figure 2.1 Framework of the Literature Review. These areas of review centre on the service-learning research phenomenon and are used as the structure for discussing relevant literature.*

At the centre of the study is the research phenomenon of service-learning within an Aboriginal educational context, and the impact it has on the pre-service teachers and
the educational providers at the Aboriginal College. However, before examining the literature on service-learning as a pedagogy and methodology, it was deemed important to set the context for the research study. As the study was conducted under the auspices of a tertiary institution for teacher education, it was viewed as essential that the current Australian government education policies be examined to build the context for the research. Hence, the first section of the literature review provides a brief overview of key government documents relevant to the current educational context of Aboriginal Education. Second, the literature pertinent to service-learning is then reviewed, with definitions, components and possible outcomes of other service-learning research described.

Third, a brief overview of the literature relevant to Aboriginal education is presented with significant findings and recommendations documented to guide the research study conducted in an Aboriginal educational context. International literature, particularly pertinent to research from New Zealand and Canada is discussed. Cultural awareness literature is reviewed in the fourth section, given the context of the research study and the investigation into the effect on pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education.

The fifth area of the literature examined the pedagogy of literacy learning, with a strong focus on that relevant to Aboriginal education. This section presents key research from studies in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, within Aboriginal contexts significant to literacy learning outcomes. Finally, the Australian National professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2011) is reviewed and its connection to the research study described. Focus is also given to the potential achievement of these standards within a pre-service teacher education course.
2.1 Government Policies relevant to Aboriginal Education

It is important that any review of literature in the area of education for the future of the Australian community begins with an analysis of documents driving the Government educational agenda. Over recent times there has been a “multiplicity of approaches and policies to improve education of Indigenous young people” (Beresford & Gray, 2012, p. 120). Here seven key policy documents are reviewed to give background to the Australian educational context and to inform the service-learning thrust of the research study.

2.1.1 Australian Educational Goals for Young Australians

The Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians (Ministerial Council for Education, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2009b) focuses on improving the educational outcomes for all Australian children. Australian Education Ministers from all states and territories signed off on this agreement that sets out the educational goals for a ten year period. Of significance to the investigation into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ perceptions and competence in Aboriginal education, is the acknowledgment of the need to improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The statement is made that “… addressing this issue must be a key priority over the next decade” (MCEETYA, 2009b, p. 5). Furthermore, literacy and numeracy competence are viewed as the “cornerstone of schooling for young Australians” (MCEETYA, 2009b, p. 5). Acknowledgement is also made of the need to work towards the goal of developing young Australians as successful, informed, creative citizens who “understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians” (MCEETYA, 2009b, p. 9). The commitment and desire for improvement
to Indigenous education is strong, with the recognition that this can only be achieved by action in eight key areas:

1. developing stronger partnerships;
2. supporting quality teaching and school leadership;
3. strengthening early childhood education;
4. enhancing middle years development;
5. supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions;
6. promoting world-class curriculum and assessment;
7. improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds;
8. strengthening accountability and transparency (MCEETYA, 2009b, p. 3).

Of specific importance in this research, is the investigation into how service-learning can be a teaching methodology for personal and professional development in teacher education to prepare pre-service teachers to address the educational outcomes of Indigenous students that enables the goals of the Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians to be realised:

- Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- Goal 2: All young Australians become
  - successful learners
  - confident and creative individuals,
  - active and informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2009b, pp. 7-8).

As part of the Melbourne declaration are statements of “Commitment to action”. The terminology, ‘Close the Gap’ has become rhetoric that has been used in many contexts, and become the focus of education for young Indigenous Australians. In particular, the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2009a), in the MCEETYA four year plan has outlined a number of national partnership agreements, in line with the work of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to inform future planning. The policy documents that are
relevant to the investigation on pre-service teachers’ development with regard to teaching Indigenous students include:

- *National partnership agreement on literacy and numeracy* (COAG, 2009c).

Each of these documents provides a framework for planning at a national level, relevant to COAG initiatives, with detailed implementation plans developed by local jurisdictions. As these agreements have impacted on current government policies and strategies, a summary of each relevant to the education of Aboriginal students follows.

### 2.1.2 National Indigenous Reform Agreement: Closing the Gap

It was recognised by COAG that there is a continued need to address Indigenous disadvantage and the structure of the *Closing the Gap Agreement* aims to work towards long-term commitment across “a range of strategic platforms or ‘Building Blocks’” (COAG, 2009a, p. 4) to achieve six specific targets. Although each of the ‘Building Blocks’ is viewed as essential and the implementation integrated for achieving improvements, two of these targets are significant to the direction of pre-service teacher education and development in Indigenous education. These are identified as the Building Blocks of: (a) Early Childhood and (b) School (COAG, 2009a, p. 4). The targets that have been articulated and agreed to by COAG, relevant to the areas of Early Childhood and Schooling are:

- ensuring all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; and,
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020 (COAG, 2009a, p. 8).
In February 2013, the Australian Government released the document entitled *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister’s Report 2013*. The report acknowledges the progress that has been made in the target areas mentioned above; however, there is still much work that needs to be done to truly address the divide between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. A commitment is given in the report by the Australian Government to continue to work with the “broader community to drive further progress on the ‘Closing the Gap’ targets” (p. 137).

### 2.1.3 National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality

Achievement of the targets stated in the *National Indigenous reform agreement: Closing the Gap* (COAG, 2009a), has significant implications for teacher education and these are articulated in the *National partnership agreement on improving teacher quality* (COAG, 2009b). It is recognised that many of the National Partnership agreements are dependent on a “quality teaching workforce” (p. 1). As such, the *National partnership agreement on improving teacher quality* has seen the development of “new professional standards; national accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses; and joint engagement with higher education to provide improved pre-service teacher education” (COAG, 2009b, p. 7).

Successful implementation of these components of the *National partnership agreement on improving teacher quality* (COAG, 2009b) has implications for the investigation into service-learning as a professional development model for improving pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Indigenous education. This begs the questions: what was the impact of a service-learning teaching methodology on pre-service teachers’ development towards the demonstration of the
professional standards for graduate teachers in the area of Aboriginal education? How relevant was the ‘joint engagement’ of a higher educational institution with an Aboriginal educational setting in developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Indigenous education? Did the experience “promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians?” (COAG, 2009b, p. 13). This study has the potential to answer these questions and validate service-learning as a methodology to improve teacher quality and achievement of the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011).

The National Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECB) Network (2012) has released a position paper that draws on the development of the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011) and the Australian Curriculum. The focus of the paper is on three key topics:

1. Pre-service teacher training;
2. Professional development and cultural competency in schools; and
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (IECB, 2012, p.1).

Recommendations from this advisory body advocate the mandating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies within all pre-service teacher education courses, and the embedding of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives across all university courses. It is also recommended that training in “cultural competency and professional development” (p. 6) be ongoing for teachers to enable them to achieve the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011). As a consequence of these recommendations, all university courses of study for undergraduate pre-service teachers must include Indigenous studies for accreditation. Service-learning may be an effective teaching and learning pedagogy and methodology for addressing the mandate of Indigenous studies in pre-service teacher training.
2.1.4 National Partnership Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy

The central objective of National partnership agreement on literacy and numeracy was to raise the “overall attainment so that all Australian students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society” (COAG, 2009c, p. 3). It also had the ambitious target of halving the gap for Aboriginal students within a decade, in the areas of reading, writing and numeracy. It was acknowledged that the Commonwealth, States and Territories had a shared responsibility to improve the outcomes of students in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Under the agreement, accountability measures have been introduced as a measure of the outcomes of achievement in literacy and numeracy, with national testing being used as performance indicators for Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013c). Significant funding has been committed to “research initiatives targeted at improving teaching capacity in literacy and numeracy to assist in the accelerated improvement of literacy and numeracy for all students” (COAG, 2009c, p. 7). The funding of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was an outcome of the agreement, with implementation plans being key directives for education policies across all States and Territories.

Literacy and numeracy achievement was integral to the investigation into pre-service teachers’ knowledge and perceptions, related to Indigenous education, as it is viewed as the “cornerstone of schooling for young Australians” (MCEETYA, 2009c, p.5) and an expected competency within the National professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2011, p. 3).
There are three key documents that have set the direction for Australian Indigenous Education:


The *Review of Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-2008* resulted from the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Reference Group on Indigenous Education (2009) evaluating and reporting on the progress made through the *Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-2008* in “improving outcomes in Indigenous education” (Unaipon, 2009, p. 10). There were five domains identified and 14 recommendations in the report, with the reference group specifically endorsing the philosophy articulated by Dr Chris Sarra, from the Stronger Smarter Institute, Queensland University of Technology. In the work ‘Stronger Smarter’ the philosophy “identifies the relationship between the teacher and the student as the most important place in any jurisdiction” (Sarra, 2009, p. 10). Most significant for the research into pre-service teachers’ perceptions, knowledge and cultural awareness in Indigenous education are Recommendations 5, 6 and 12. Each of these recommendations identified the need to incorporate the principles of Indigenous education referred to in the “What works” program (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). References were made to other essential documents in the education

If Australia is to improve the quality of its teachers for significant improvement in academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students it is necessary that … the quality of the Indigenous content in teacher education programs must be improved and has to be based on the most up to date information we have in relation to good practice in this area (Unaipon, 2009, p. 15).

As a consequence of the Review, a further document entitled *Aboriginal Education action plan 2010-2014* (MCEECDYA, 2011) was developed, the purpose of which was to present an action plan enabling a coordinated approach to improving Aboriginal education across “a range of agreed goals and underlined the importance of making Aboriginal education the core business of education providers” (p. 1). The Department of Education (DET) used the Review as the basis for the development of the *Aboriginal education plan 2011-2014* for Western Australia. Six domains were identified as critical areas for improving Aboriginal educational outcomes:

- Readiness for school
- Engagement and connections
- Attendance
- Literacy and numeracy
- Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development
- Pathways to real post school option

Each of these domains has implication for pre-service teacher education. A consistent message flows through many of the current policy documents on Aboriginal Education, namely that the challenge of ‘Closing the Gap’ must be a national priority and at the forefront of the Australian Government investment for the future. Higher
education has a key role to play in the preparation of teachers. The research on service-
learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and
cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, through exposure to an Aboriginal
educational setting, has important implications as to the effectiveness of such a
methodology to ‘Close the Gap’ between the learning outcomes of Indigenous and non-
Indigenous.

2.1.6 Learning the lessons? Pre-service teacher preparation

In 2011, the Queensland Department of Education and Training, Director of
Indigenous Education Policy, Ms Angela Barney, commissioned the Director of
Indigenous Research Network at the Queensland University of Technology to undertake
a ‘desktop’ audit of “all universities’ pre-service teacher training … as it relates to
Indigenous education” (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 1). Preliminary findings based on
the literature review of Indigenous education in pre-service teacher education presented
six key findings and made ten recommendations. Of relevance to the current study of
service-learning as methodology of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge,
perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, was the notion of the
“separation and imbalance between Indigenous content and the transfer of effective
teaching skills in pre-service teacher education” (p. 1). The focus in the courses of study
reviewed was on the curriculum knowledge and understanding rather than on the skills
of effective teaching. The second area of the preliminary findings questioned the
empirical evidence to support the claim of the “transformative effect of Indigenous
studies” (p. 1). As such, the report called on teacher training courses to match both
knowledge and awareness of Indigenous studies with the development of pedagogy and
skills. Thus, the recommendation was made to “Research and identify best practice
pedagogical and community engagement models to inform in-service, professional
development and pre-service teacher training” (p. 2). It is anticipated that the current study may enlighten those in teacher training as to the impact of service-learning as a pedagogy and methodology for increasing knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal education, whilst at the same time developing effective teaching skills and strategies.

2.1.7 National Professional Standards for Teachers

Pre-service teachers are expected, on completion of their teaching degree, to be able to demonstrate the Standards related to the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011), a framework which makes explicit the knowledge, skills and attributes required at four stages across teachers’ careers; “Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher” (AITSL, 2011, p. 2). The expected standards of competence for teachers at each of these stages are articulated. In particular, the Graduate standards are documented and endorsed as a requirement for teacher education accreditation and registration. These standards are organised across the three domains of *Professional knowledge, Professional practice, and Professional engagement*. Each of these domains is further expanded into seven Standard statements, with level descriptors for the various categories of teacher professional status. All standards are important for Graduate teacher competence; however, those significant for this research are the level Standard statements for Graduate teachers as shown in Table 2.1.
Table 2.1

**National professional standards for teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>Graduate Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1: Know students and how they learn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds</td>
<td>1.3 Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students</td>
<td>1.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content and pedagogy in the teaching area</td>
<td>2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and pedagogy in the teaching area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>2.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, culture and languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and numeracy strategies</td>
<td>2.5 Know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from “National professional standards for teachers” by Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Education, 2011.

As stated in the National professional standards for teachers: Graduate standards (AITSL, 2011), it is expected that pre-service teachers will be able to demonstrate competence in teaching Aboriginal students. In this study, service-learning was used as the teaching methodology to support the development of pre-service teachers’ competencies in meeting expected standards. Hence four areas of study were targeted: service-learning as a teaching methodology for personal and professional development; development of pre-service teachers’ cultural awareness; knowledge of literacy pedagogy for Aboriginal education; and progress towards the achievement of the graduate competencies. Key Australian government policies have been reviewed to
enable the research study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness to be put into an educational context. The importance of exploring possibilities to enable education to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people is embedded in all the policies reviewed. As there now appears to be real urgency for positive action to help ‘Close the Gap’, it is hoped that the research study using a service-learning methodology may provide a way forward both for pre-service teachers, Aboriginal students and tertiary educators in course development.

2.2 Service-learning: A definition and theoretical framework

A review of the literature pertinent to service-learning is presented as service-learning is central to the research study. The rationale of service-learning pedagogy is discussed, with the concept defined, learning outcomes explored and the factors necessary for effective implementation examined. These areas are presented in the next section of the review of literature.

Numerous definitions of the term ‘service-learning’ can be found in the literature, with Kendall (1990) stating that she had found 147 different definitions. For the purpose of this research, the definition by Jacoby (1996) encapsulates the key components and defines service-learning as:

… Experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning (p. 5).

It is important to note the use of the hyphen in the terminology service-learning “it symbolizes the symbiotic relationship between service and learning” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5). Thus the sense of an equal partnership between those involved in the serving and
service is crucial. As stated, “service-learning is learning for all who are part of the process. The more that all parties involved remember they are each teachers and students, the richer the service-learning scenario will be” (Ross & Thomas, 2003, p. 46).

As purported by Lavery and Hackett (2008), there is an increasing popularity of service-learning programs in Australia, within primary, secondary and tertiary education. It follows the trend in the United States of America, where research into service-learning has gained prominence in recent times. Research by Eyler and Giles (1999) has been influential in providing empirical data as to the learning outcomes of service-learning. Two extensive national research projects in the United States of America, involving more than fifteen hundred students concluded that service-learning makes a difference, with the impact being more significant where there is high quality service-learning. It was stated that:

Service-learning aims to connect the personal and intellectual, to help students acquire knowledge that is useful in understanding the world, build critical thinking capacities, and perhaps lead to fundamental questions about learning and about society and a commitment to both. Service-learning aims to prepare students as lifelong learners and participants in the world (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 14).

With the significant increase in service-learning throughout America and interest in Australia, educationalists are exploring more and more the theoretical underpinnings related to the service-learning methodology. Cone and Harris (1996) maintain that for over two decades, the theoretical perspectives of Dewey, Piaget, Kolb, Friere and Lewin have provided the philosophical, psychological and social reasoning behind service-learning practices. However, more recent developments in social theory and cognitive psychology must also be considered in any theoretical framework. Social cognitive theory as described by Schunk (2009) stresses that “much human learning occurs in a
social environment. By observing others, people acquire knowledge, rules, strategies, beliefs and attitudes …” (p. 78). Thus the underlining assumptions of social cognitive theory addresses “the reciprocal interactions among persons, behaviours, and environments, the differences between enactive and vicarious learning (i.e., the ways learning occurs), and the distinction between learning and performance” (p. 79).

Bandura (1982a, 1986, and 2001) developed a framework of “triadic reciprocity or reciprocal interactions among behaviours, environmental variables and personal factors such as cognitions” (cited in Schunk, 2009, p.79). Such a framework is fundamental to the goals, structure, reflection and reciprocity of service-learning. As stated by Jacoby (1996) “Service-learning is therefore a philosophy of reciprocity, which implies a concerted effort to move from charity to justice, from service to elimination of need” (p. 9). Thus it is acknowledged that service-learning has the potential to enhance the learning and development of undergraduate teachers, whilst meeting the needs of a wider community. It provides an important link between theory and practice.

2.2.1 Components of Service-Learning

In reviewing the early development of service-learning, the writing of Robert Sigmon (1979, cited in Jacoby, 1996) has been influential in providing principles for best practice. Three principles are articulated as:

1. Those being served control service(s) provided;
2. Those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions; and,
3. Those who serve also are learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned (p. 28).
Further research in subsequent decades has seen the development of the Wingspread Principles of Good Practice, from work undertaken in Wisconsin culminating in the publication of *Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service Learning* (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). Ten principles are articulated that combine service and learning to make an effective and sustained program. More recently, the work of Kaye (2004) identified four interdependent essentials for successful implementation of service-learning. These are grouped into: “preparation; action; reflection; and demonstration” (Kaye, 2004, p. 10).

Six essential elements for service-learning are: “Integrated learning; meeting genuine needs; youth voice and choice; collaborative efforts; reciprocity; and civic responsibility” (Kaye, 2004, p. 37). Four similar basic elements were identified by Chambers and Lavery (2012) as essential in an effective service-learning program. First, there must be engagement in hands-on service through real life needs in the community; second, that the learning goals for both the server and those receiving the service are of equal importance; third, reciprocity must be a key element; and finally, implementation of the program must adhere to the four interdependent stages mentioned above.

Five critical elements were also identified by the study completed over several years by the Campus Outreach Opportunity League: and these are stated as “community voice; orientation and training; meaningful action; reflection; and evaluation” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 30). These elements have been crucial in the development of the service-learning methodology as part of the investigation into pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education.
In an effort to draw together the various principles of good practice for service-learning, the term ‘the kaleidoscope’ was used by Jacoby (1996) with the analogy:

That turning the kaleidoscope permits the examination of the principles and practices from multiple vantage points. The relationship among the lenses shifts with every turn of the instrument….[Hence] the intersection of the three lenses [enables] the most comprehensive assessment of the principles (p. 34).

Thus the essential elements of service-learning related to the research of the perceptions and cultural awareness of pre-service teachers when they participated in a service-learning experience in an Aboriginal educational context may be viewed in terms of “collaboration, reciprocity and diversity” (ibid, p. 34).

Reflection and reciprocity need to play a pivotal role in service-learning. Indeed, these two components distinguish service-learning from volunteering. Reflection is seen as a key component of service-learning, for much of the learning takes place through the structured reflection or debriefing that occurs regularly as part of a service-learning methodology. It is acknowledged that the “learning and development do not necessarily occur as a result of the experience itself but as a result of a reflective component explicitly designed to foster learning and development” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 6). How the reflection is facilitated will depend on the context of the service-learning and discipline through which the experience is organised. It may take the form of oral, written or a combination of communication mode, and should enable feedback to be shared by all participants. It is purported that well-designed reflection has the ability to “add new meaning to service experiences, enrich the academic content of the course, and develop the students’ ability to take informed actions in the future (Dewey, 1916, cited in Bringle, Philips & Hudson, 2004, p. 6).
Reciprocity is the second essential component. This is the essence of the relationship between the “server and the person or group being served. All parties in service-learning are learners and help determine what is to be learned. Both the server and those served teach, and both learn” (Kendall, 1990, cited in Jacoby, 1996, p. 7). A sense of empowerment is created when those involved in the service-learning view each other as equals and able to contribute to the learning outcomes.

If service-learning has such a significant impact on the learning process, how does it influence the perceptions and cultural awareness of pre-service teachers when participating in a service-learning experience in an Aboriginal educational context? This research has the potential to add to the data on the impact of service-learning as a methodology for improving the learning outcomes of pre-service teachers in gaining competence in Aboriginal education.

### 2.2.2 Outcomes of the service-learning experience

There are numerous studies into the impact of the service-learning experience that address a broad range of outcomes. Some of these findings, from both Australian and international studies are described within the following section of the literature review. Australian researchers Chambers and Lavery (2012) believe that service-learning is successful in encouraging the growth of individuals, personally and professionally. They endorse the work of Kaye (2004) in that “leadership, empathy, collaboration, community, knowledge and skills are developed” through the service-learning experience (Chambers & Lavery, 2012, Introduction, para.1). They discussed how research into two programs coordinated at a university involving pre-service teachers has impacted on six overarching themes. These themes are similar to those
mentioned above: “empathy, leadership, self and societal reflections, confidence, professional practice and knowledge and skills” (Chambers & Lavery, 2012, Discussion section, para.1). It is reasonable to conclude that service-learning programs are valuable and important in developing pre-service teachers’ understanding of the needs of others, whilst enabling the individuals to learn more about themselves.

In another research article, Lavery (2007) concluded that although service-learning experiences can be “challenging, confronting and demanding … involvement gives a sense of satisfaction, a feeling of social awareness and real opportunities for learning and personal transformation” (p. 53). He outlined how participation in a tertiary Christian service-learning unit conducted over a three year period had a significant impact on the participants. Such an impact was described as “transformative” in that participants shared experiences that promoted personal development, especially in showing greater compassion, and enacting a greater sense of individual responsibility. It has also been purported that service-learning offers pre-service teachers “the opportunity to exercise leadership skills and develop a strong sense of empathy and civic responsibility” (Lavery, 2013, p. 153). The development of leadership skills within a context of serving was viewed as a key outcome of the service-learning experiences critiqued by Lavery (2013).

Service-learning has been viewed by Cipolle (2010) as a way of facilitating social change. It is believed that students who participate in service-learning develop a “greater awareness and broader perspective of social issues … that enhance their feelings of competency and efficacy” (p. 11). Cipolle developed a Social Justice Model of Service-Learning and “within this structure articulated four essential elements of
Critical Consciousness Development. These elements are represented in Figure 2.2 and seen as important considerations in planning and structuring the service-learning experience.

It is through the development of a ‘critical consciousness’ that the “service-learning becomes transformative in nature” (p. 39).

![Critical Consciousness Diagram](image)

*Figure 2.2* A diagram of the stages of critical consciousness experienced through service-learning. The model is termed the *Social Justice Model of Service-Learning*. Adapted from “Service-learning and social justice” by Cipolle, 2010, p. 40.

In the development of a ‘critical consciousness’ defined as “having an accurate view of reality”, four essential elements are identified by Cipolle (2010):

- Developing a deeper awareness of self;
- Developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of others;
- Developing a deeper awareness and broader perspective of social issues; and
- Seeing one’s potential to make change (p. 7.).

These elements are viewed as the ‘building blocks’ for developing an attitude and disposition towards a “social justice orientation to service” (p. 9).

Similar findings are presented in the research article by Crump (2002) where he analysed two different community-based service-learning projects. He purported that
through service-learning experiences, student engagement was high and that “learning outcomes strengthened when classroom instruction was directly linked to practice” (p. 145). Students gained valuable experience in real-world environments when they participated in service-learning programs. These programs promoted problem solving and critical thinking. According to Crump (2002), service-learning also catered for the different learning styles of the students participating, improved their self-confidence and promoted active citizenship. In terms of reciprocity, Crump (2002) believed that the community organisations also benefited from students participating in the service-learning program as it provided additional human resources, and enabled students to build leadership skills. Connections between university institutions and community organisations were consolidated through the service-learning programs. For the university staff involved in these programs, they became more “facilitators” than “givers of knowledge”; and engaged in many teaching and learning opportunities (Crump, 2002, p. 145). Detailed planning, coordination and commitment of staff, students and community in the service-learning experience is viewed as essential. Crump concluded by stating, “My greatest reward, however, is to witness how the energy and enthusiasm of the students is activated by their community experience (2002, p. 151).

Another significant study into service-learning as a way of improving student learning outcomes was conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) over a three year period (Prentice & Robinson, 2010). Throughout the study, from 2006-2009, both qualitative and quantitative measures were used to explore the relationship between participation and academic achievement of students in 13 different colleges across America, involved in service-learning programs. Data were collected through focus groups, and surveys using a six point Likert-type scale. The questions in
the survey focused on six learning outcomes: “critical thinking; communication; career and teamwork; civic responsibility; global understanding and citizenship; and academic development and educational success” (p. 2). A detailed summary of the methodology was, and survey questions were, presented in the article, together with the results and recommendations. Prentice and Robinson (2010) concluded that “Service-learning students scored statistically higher in five out of six learning area outcomes” (p. 4) compared to those in curriculum courses without service-learning. It was also reported by service-learning participants that the class information was made more relevant by the experience; students were enthused and motivated; learning extended beyond the textbook; promotion of real-life problem-solving and critical thinking occurred; as did development in students’ confidence. Others shared that retention of academic content was easier because there were “real-life consequences” (p. 8). Terms such as fun, exciting, frustrating, demanding and satisfying were used in the article to describe the service-learning experience.

In summary, Prentice and Robinson (2010) outlined the value of service-learning in three primary areas; first, students developed both academically and career wise, becoming “well rounded individuals”. Second, students were able to “identify their biases and to replace those biases with accurate information”. In doing so, they acknowledged the perceptions of others, thus becoming more culturally competent. Third, students recognised the need to “embrace everyone’s humanity and that, as human beings, we all need each other” (Prentice & Robinson, 2010, p. 11). Service-learning was viewed as a way of learning through life’s experiences, problems and solutions.
It was acknowledged by many research sources that there are wide and varied outcomes for students and others who participate in service-learning. Many of these concepts can be related to the key areas identified by Kaye (2004), who purported that when classroom content, literature and skills are connected to community needs, students will:

- Apply academic, social and personal skills to improve the community;
- Make decisions that have real, not hypothetical results;
- Grow as individuals, gain respect for peers, and increase civic participation;
- Experience success no matter what their ability level;
- Gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community, and society; and
- Develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems, work as a team; and, demonstrate their abilities while and through helping others (p. 7).

The study into service learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education should provide further evidence of the impact of such a methodology.

2.2.3 Factors necessary for implementation of service-learning

With the interest and growth of service-learning, particularly in the Australian higher education context, there is debate about whether there should be guidelines defined as to the implementation of service-learning courses. Butin (2005) advocates that rather than enforce strict criteria for what makes successful practices, “What instead I can do and should do, is look carefully at the practices in my own shop, the enactment of service-learning experiences, and figure out how it works. This is, it seems to me, more than enough to ask for” (p. 103). He also maintained that service-learning needs to avoid being constrained by traditional “academic interpretive community by embracing the transformational potential of a post modern pedagogy ... and continue to experiment with different notions of what works in service-learning and how it works” (Butin, 2005, p. 102).
In contrast to the view of Butin (2010), there is a plethora of information as to the core elements of effective service-learning. McDonald (2006) provided a summary from Central Michigan University that supports the designing of course material in developing a service-learning unit of study. Drawing on research from Eyler and Giles (1999) and Kaye (2004), he is prescriptive. Guidelines are presented under the rubric of service-learning components: needs identified; learning areas to be addressed; participants identified with relevant roles; service details provided; reflection processes articulated; evaluation detailed; and finally, publicity of the project. Complementing McDonald (2006), is the “Blueprint for Service-learning” by Kaye (2004, p. 16) who detailed six steps that can be used to guide the service-learning process:

- Step One: Points of entry
- Step Two: Map out your plans
- Step Three: Clarify partnerships
- Step Four: Review plans and gather resources
- Step Five: Begin the process of service-learning in action
- Step Six: Assess the service-learning experience. (pp. 16-17).

Each of these steps is further articulated by Kaye in her text, and examples and proforma provided for those interested in using her advice in developing a service-learning program.

Cone and Harris (1996) also provided a theoretical framework and advice on the implementing of service-learning programs. They advocated a six stage lens model. The first stage begins with the individual characteristics of the learner being considered as far as possible in the service-learning experience. The second stage involves carefully planning to appropriately match the service-learner practitioner with a placement that will challenge them academically, yet ensure adequate preparation and knowledge of theoretical concepts to meet the community needs. In the third stage, the focus is on the service-learning experience, such that it is a “discontinuous one” being distinct from
the students’ everyday experiences so that students are challenged to broaden their perspectives on the world” (p. 33). The next stage, four, relates to reflection, an essential component of all service-learning experiences.

Cone and Harris (1996) advocate a model that is facilitated by an educator as part of the reflective learning process. The final stage connects with the learner recognising that such experiences “have potentially profound effects on students’ intellectual and personal growth” (p. 34). The learning for each individual is unique and the service-learning program must recognise and accommodate the learning styles of participants. As a consequence, the model of implementation of the service-learning experience advocated by Cone and Harris aims to “help students constantly critique, evaluate and build on knowledge and move to intellectually ‘higher ground’ and at the same time, continue to critically examine their roles within our complex and diverse society” (ibid, p. 41). Thus the factors for effective implementation are influenced by the theoretical framework of those creating the service-learning experience. It is recognised that the experience must involve experiential learning, whilst addressing the needs of the community; incorporate structured opportunities for reflection; with reciprocity recognised and valued.

### 2.2.4 Service-learning: Conclusion

Key literature on service-learning has been presented to define the methodology, identify essential components, review the outcomes of service-learning experiences from research studies and discuss factors for implementing service-learning. The potential and value of using service-learning in higher education is gaining recognition. As stated by Weigert (1998) “first, there is a joy that academic service-learning provides. It contributes to the renewal of the love of teaching that draws so many into
higher education” (p. 9). Second, it helps teachers and students feel that they are “making a difference” together and to the world. Many new opportunities often arise from the service-learning experience and relationships between students, teachers, faculty and community are explored and developed. Third, as the area of service-learning is relatively new and evolving, there is the opportunity to develop and contribute to research on service-learning. Finally, service-learning may provide a vehicle to all partners involved for “thinking and responding in new, collaborative ways to the critical issues that confront our local and global worlds” (Weigert, 1998, p. 9).

Given the aforementioned, the research study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education may contribute to improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal people and help better prepare undergraduate teachers to meet the demands of the teaching profession in the 21st century. Accordingly, the following section of the literature review presents a brief overview of the literature relevant to Aboriginal education with significant findings and recommendations documented to guide the research study conducted in an Aboriginal educational context.

2.3 Aboriginal Education

There are many complex issues related to the topic of Aboriginal education that are well beyond the parameters of the current research study. However, the research of Hattie (2009) and Sarra (2009) provide substantial evidence important to the current research study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Both concur with the philosophy that “… identifies the relationship between the teacher and the student as the most important place in any education jurisdiction” (Sarra, 2009, p. 10).
As stated in the *Teaching reading: Report and recommendations* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005),

The key message to be gained from educational effectiveness research is that quality teachers and their professional learning do make a difference in the classroom. It is not so much what students bring with them that matters, but what they experience on a day-to-day basis in interaction with teachers and other students in classrooms that does (p.10).

Quality teaching demands that teachers have high expectations of students, quality curriculum and quality accountability of student outcomes. Pedagogical practices must be implemented that engage students in the learning. A teacher needs to have “a good understanding of the child as an individual, including the cultural context in which the child has been raised” (Unaipon, 2009, p. 13). The focus of the literature review on Aboriginal education is on the teacher and how he/she can improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students.

In an Australian context, all graduate teachers are expected to be able to meet the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011), at the Graduate level. Key to the present research are the two components directly concerned with Aboriginal education, as shown previously in Table 1.1, namely, “strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students” (p. 9) and “an understanding and respect … to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians” (p. 11). The following documents previously mentioned in the policy section of the literature review, are further explored in what follows with their specific relevance for the role of the teacher, strategies for teaching and ways of building understanding and respect, and promoting reconciliation, with regard to Indigenous students.
2.3.1 What works. The What Works program

The “What works” program (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) was a government initiative “designed to explore how improvements in achievements might be made relatively quickly through dedicated resources and effort” (p. 1). As such, 83 different projects were documented in the report. A summary of findings listed a series of key points that have emerged from these studies. Relevant to the current study are the concepts that achieved successful outcomes:

1. Cultural recognition, acknowledgement and support;
2. The development of requisite skills (Literacy and Numeracy); and,
3. Adequate levels of participation (2000, p.8).

It was further noted, that essential to these concepts was the partnership of all involved in the educational process. Communities and school staff both have a role to play in ensuring successful outcomes. Teachers need to ensure that their high expectations of students enable requisite skills to develop through an approach that is sensitive, welcoming and acknowledges the student’s background. Also essential to student achievement is “active encouragement from home” (2000, p.8). Accordingly, a holistic approach was advocated that incorporated all three components listed above.

More recently, a repository of resources has been established by the Council of Australian Government through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) entitled Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in evidence 2010-11. The purpose of the clearinghouse was to present research findings on projects focussed on overcoming disadvantage within Aboriginal communities. Evidence related to three areas of research is documented in the resource; however, the relevant information to the current study relates only to the component of
“Early childhood” and “Governance and leadership”. The key messages from principles and practices in “Early childhood” identified as improving learning outcomes are:

- High-quality, holistic and early intervention and education;
- Involvement of families;
- Teacher training;
- Cultural competence and cultural safety; and,
- Local involvement in program development (p. 7).

It is also noted in the document, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in evidence 2010-11, that program design and implementation needs to be “flexible and tailored to the needs of individuals and to the context of the community as a whole” (p. 8). The employment of Indigenous staff, especially when non-Indigenous educators run the program, needs to be prioritised to support improved learning outcomes for children. Community participation by local people is crucial to ensure maximum ownership and impact for the best outcomes in an early childhood context.

In reviewing the area of “Governance and leadership”, the key principles for effective outcomes related to these concepts were listed as:

- Culturally appropriate and culturally ‘safe’ services;
- Culturally competent service delivery;
- Suitably qualified and experienced field staff;
- A flexible approach to designing and funding initiatives;
- A community development approach; and
- Leadership development that incorporates core facets of Indigenous leadership styles (p.11).

Although not all these principles apply directly to the classroom teacher, it is vital that an understanding of evidence from successful programs is shared with all those involved in the education community. Further advice is documented for
successful program implementation and it is important to note the need for capacity building, flexible and open organisational structures, integrating of two cultures within a long term framework and opportunities for community leadership development. Of interest, too, is the suggestion of training for conflict resolution and greater recognition of the Indigenous women within a community.

Despite the many research programs that have been incorporated into the material presented in the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (2010-11) by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), it is acknowledged that there are major gaps in the research to support “best practice” in the delivery of early childhood programs for Indigenous families within Indigenous contexts. Further and ongoing research needs to be undertaken to add to the evidence of what works for addressing Indigenous disadvantage.

Another research study, part of the What Works. The Work Program entitled Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools (National Curriculum Services) reported its findings in July 2012. It was acknowledged that many remote schools were improving educational outcomes, and that it was important to share the successful strategies being implemented. Thus the study presented the key findings of thirteen remote schools that reinforce what works well, summarised as: strong school leadership; quality teaching and workforce development; adopting a high expectations culture; and, engaging with parents and others in the local community.

Each of these findings is discussed in depth through the study entitled Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools (National
Curriculum Services, 2012); however, of interest to the current study is that related to quality teaching and workforce development. Emphasis is placed on the need to build a shared vision of educational goals that are agreed upon through a two-way dialogue between the school and community. Essential to achieving these goals is a school culture of high expectations for the Aboriginal students and all involved in the educational context. It is advocated that there be “whole-school approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching” (National Curriculum Services, 2012, p. 8) and that an instructional model be followed by each classroom. Such a model is stated as having common components of:

- Revision of previous learning;
- Discussion of learning intentions for the class;
- The use of whole-class and small group learning; and,
- Lesson conclusions involving whole-class review of what has been learned (National Curriculum Services, 2012, p. 8).

Such a model also acts as an accountability mechanism and staff are encouraged to use “focused teaching, assessment data and explicit teaching … to make the work learning content challenging, accessible, engaging and culturally responsive” (p. 8). The paper, *Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools* (National Curriculum Services, 2012) articulated the concepts in the above statement, and it is valuable to review the description of each: focused teaching; assessment data; and explicit teaching.

Focused teaching is viewed as “teaching focused on the learning needs of each student” (National Curriculum Services, 2012, p. 38). The pedagogy underpinning the concept of focused teaching was linked to the main theoretical concepts described as “the ‘zone of proximal development’ and ‘assisted development’ (Vygotsky, 1978); ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976); and ‘gradual release of responsibility’
(Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)” (cited in National Curriculum Services, 2012, p. 38). It was observed by the researchers that emphasis on focused teaching by the classroom teachers enabled an approach that was more student-centred, with fewer teacher-centred approaches being used. Teachers also shared their own planning, teaching and assessment cycle. Thus the need for assessment data to identify the learning needs of the students was described by the teachers who were participating in the research study.

Assessment data and student information was a theme explored by the researchers in the report on *Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools* (National Curriculum Services, 2012) with the observation that all the schools were at different stages of development, but were focused on improving data collection and teaching practices. A variety of tools of assessment were used with common elements being; *First steps map of development* (Annandale, et al., 2009a); *Remote schools curriculum and assessment materials* (Northern Territory Government of Australia, 2009); *NSW Quality teaching and learning model* (Department of Education and Training, 2006); *Aboriginal literacy strategy* (Department of Education, 2005) and the *Kimberley literacy profile* (Kimberley Success Zone, 2013). Also used by schools was the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) assessment data for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN is made up of tests in the four areas of Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and Numeracy. NAPLAN tests skills in literacy and numeracy that are developed over time through the school curriculum (ACARA, 2013c). However, it was recognised by the schools and teachers that “the closer to the point of teaching that assessment data are generated the more useful they become diagnostically to identify appropriate evidence-based teaching actions” (National Curriculum Services, 2012, p. 40). In response to the assessment information, the report
described the differentiation of curriculum that occurred in the various schools through strategies such as class groupings, cross-grade groupings and individualised instruction.

Explicit teaching was described as “…directing student attention towards producing specific learning outcomes, with content broken down into small parts and taught individually” (National Curriculum Services, 2012, p. 41). Such an approach is advocated through much of the current literature related to the teaching of literacy and numeracy, with teachers also employing modelling, demonstrating, discussion and explanation as key classroom practices. In summary, among the common themes across the eleven remote schools that were evidenced in improving learning outcomes, were the concepts of focused teaching, use of assessment data and information, and the practice of explicit teaching. However, it was also acknowledged that all schools had built a school culture that was characterised by positive classroom relationships and orderly learning environments. These relationships were built on the principles that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be given respect, and students’ cultures and relevant implications of those cultures must be respected” (p. 42).

In What works. The work program: Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools (National Curriculum Services, 2012), there is a wealth of material that enriches the knowledge of educators as to strategies that have been shown to improve the outcomes of Indigenous students. Case studies of individual schools clearly document classroom teaching strategies and programs that have been successful in Indigenous education. As more and more research studies are undertaken to explore successful school learning programs and to address the “gaps” in Aboriginal education, the greater opportunity there will be for the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to be addressed. Another of the What works. The work
program considered in the next section of the literature review is entitled *Stepping up: What works in pre-service teacher education* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009c). Discussion of the document related to pre-service teacher education follows.

### 2.3.2 Stepping up: What works in pre-service teacher education

The purpose of the paper *Stepping Up: What works in pre-service teacher education* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009c) was to assist those in pre-service education to incorporate relevant materials into tertiary teacher training courses. As such, it is very relevant to the current study in that it highlights the significance of the teacher in students’ achievement. The paper draws on quotations from Hattie (2003) with the powerful statement that:

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

Further to the above statement, the report advocates that the aspects of quality teaching identified by Hattie (2009) be a starting point for training pre-service teachers to address the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: “feedback, instructional quality, direct instruction, remediation, class environment, challenging goals, peer tutoring, mastery learning, homework, teacher style, questioning, advance organisers, simulation and games, and computer assisted instruction” (cited in National Curriculum Services, 2009, p. 2). Other research by Craven and Price (2009) emphasised the importance of self-concept with evidence that “self-concept shares a causal and reciprocal relationship with achievement … and
enhancing self-concept is a potential intervention …” may help improve the outcomes of Indigenous students (Craven & Price, 2009, p. 5).

The recommendations of the review written in 2009 are strongly supportive of Aboriginal Studies being incorporated into pre-service teacher courses. Current policies now mandate that all pre-service teachers undertake such units of study to enable demonstration of the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011). The current study into service-learning as a methodology for building pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness should add to the knowledge of strategies to support pre-service teachers’ achievement of these professional standards.

2.3.3 Dare to lead

Another resource that has been developed to assist in the professional learning of educators in the area of Aboriginal Education is that termed *Dare to lead* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012b). The *Dare to lead* program was an Australian Government initiative with the purpose of improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. It was established in 2000, and has continued to be funded nationally in support of partnerships to build success. There is a specific focus on school principals as leaders in the process of improving Indigenous educational outcomes, and schools can participate in professional development and training using the many resources that are available on the *Dare to lead* website (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012b). Significant to the current study are the critical issues presented in the document as “Professional Discussion Starters”. These are designed to promote in-depth discussion with school staff as an entry point for professional dialogue and future planning. There are three critical issues presented with background notes to guide staff discussion:
1. “All students should be treated equally.” It is posited that equity demands that the student needs dictate “the level of program, educational, social, welfare and emotional support they receive.” Thus the support is not determined by heritage or social status, but by student needs.

2. “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students work best in practical sessions.”
Such a statement is considered one of the “many myths” about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and all students, regardless of culture, have preferred learning styles. Hence it is important for all students to be able to engage with their preference for learning in some way each day.

3. “All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should have a Personalised Learning Plan.” Although Personalised Learning Plans (PLP) have been mandated nationally for all Aboriginal students, schools have implemented them differently; nevertheless, the purpose of the mandate was to ensure a three-way meeting with “parents, teachers and students as a means of building relationships that would lead to shared planning, knowledge and support of student learning” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Dare to lead*, 2012b, Professional Discussion Starters, Number One). An outcome of the mandate has been the inclusion of other non-Indigenous students in PLPs that has assisted in a more positive view of the strategy.

There are numerous other resources that can be accessed through the *Dare to lead* website, with links to relevant material for professional learning and school planning (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012b). The *Dare to lead* (2012b) program has developed through four phases, each with a
focus that has built on the previous phases. The current phase recognises the changes and achievements of the earlier phases, attributing much to the partnerships built between school leaders, working with the community, and organisations to improve the outcomes for Indigenous students. Hence, the fourth phase has a focus entitled “Partnership Builds Success 2009-2012”, and promotes further cooperation between organisations, education sectors and professional associations to create “sustained, systemic change and improved outcomes fostered through partnerships” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Dare to lead*, 2012b, Phase Four). Such a focus is significant for the current research study in that it strongly supports collaboration between educational institutions to promote better outcomes for Indigenous students. The partnership between an Aboriginal college and the University School of Education was essential to enable the service-learning program to be facilitated. The success of the initial pilot study between the two educational institutions enabled the continuation of the service-learning experience in the following year.

### 2.3.4 What works. The work program: Core issues

*What works. The work program* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) also included a series entitled “Core Issues”, being ten papers addressing important concerns for those working to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. These papers are a valuable resource for educators, providing practical advice across a range of topics structured around three key areas: building awareness; forming partnerships; and working systematically. In many ways, these three concepts encapsulate the essential components of Aboriginal education and provide a framework for teachers and schools to work towards improving the outcomes of Aboriginal students. A review of pertinent Core Issue papers will be discussed in the section related to cultural awareness and literacy pedagogy.
2.3.5 Aboriginal education: Conclusion

Research in Aboriginal education has recommended a number of teaching practices that support all learners, especially Aboriginal students. These are summarised in the *Aboriginal literacy research project* commissioned by the Office of the Board of Studies (NSW) as:

1. High expectations
2. Authentic assessment
3. Recognition and acceptance of Aboriginal English
4. Purposeful literacy experiences
5. Culturally appropriate content
6. Pedagogical relationships between Aboriginal learners and their teachers
   (Munns, Lawson & Mootz, n.d. p. 8-10).

In view of the focus on pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, it is deemed important that significant research in the area of cultural awareness be part of the literature review. As such, the following section examines pertinent literature related to cultural awareness.

2.4 Cultural Awareness

The words of Herbert (2010), an Indigenous educator, are powerful in addressing the rhetoric of ‘Closing the Gap’. She questions “whether the gap between education outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can be closed without confronting why it exists” (p. 8). The story related in the article entitled *A question of belonging*, expounds the view that there are many deep and underlying reasons for ‘the Gap’ and she urges “committing to some deep reflection about our attitudes towards ‘difference’, especially cultural difference, is the first step” (Herbert, 2010, p. 11). Changing the relationship between ‘old and new Australians’ is critical if there is to be a ‘Closing of the Gap’. Thus the need to build cultural awareness is essential in addressing the complex issues related to Aboriginal education. The study
into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness, seeks to explore the impact such a methodology has on developing pre-service teachers’ awareness of Aboriginal culture.

2.4.1 Culture: Definition

Culture is defined in many different ways. In essence “Culture is more than songs, paintings and ceremonies. It is more than houses, clothes and tools. Culture is the way we think, the way we act, the way we feel about things” (Generation One, 2013, home web page). Culture is also defined as “what we create beyond our biology. Not given to us, but made by us” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010b, p. 22). Furthermore, culture includes all aspects of human diversity and ways of being, “such as gender, ethnicity, class, religion, ability, age and sexuality” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010b, p. 22). It is stated in the United Nations Convention on the Human Rights of the Child (1959) that “the child is entitled to receive education … which will promote his/her general culture … to become a useful member of society” (p. 164). Thus it seems essential that educators build a deep understanding and awareness of the culture, both their own and those of people within the learning community.

2.4.2 Cultural competence

Recent terminology, ‘cultural competence’ has been introduced to encapsulate the importance and depth of understanding of culture, cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in working within a multicultural society. The term ‘cultural competence’ is evident in much of the literature and is described as “a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural settings (Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010b, p. 21). The underlying concept of being culturally competent relates to the building of trust, respect for diversity, equity, fairness and social justice. Such a term acknowledges the need to address many of the issues of the past such as injustices, inequality, prejudice, racism and legislated exclusion and inequity. “Cultural competence is about our will and actions to build understanding between people, to be respectful and open to different cultural perspectives, strengthen cultural security and work towards equality in opportunity” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010b, p. 21). At the heart of developing cultural competence, is the building of relationships that respect, appreciate and are open to learning about others. Equally important for an individual to be culturally competent, is a “strong knowledge of how their own culture shapes their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours and an awareness of the limited value of stereotyping” (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010b, p. 21).

In Gower and Byrne’s (2012), *Becoming a culturally competent teacher: beginning the journey*, cultural competency is defined as developing “an informed position based on an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal issues, culture and way of life that enables confident and effective interaction with Aboriginal people and the wider society” (p. 380). The emphasis of these writers was on teacher education that provided both “Western academic knowledge … coupled with Indigenous studies and practical experience of working with Indigenous people so that students develop appropriate levels of ‘cultural competence’”. Such an approach to Aboriginal education where the teacher connects with students “entering into and empathising with the personal lives of … students and their culture, along with [one’s] own values and practices” is seen as the way forward to improve the outcomes of Indigenous students.
(Gower & Byrne, 2012, p. 380). Similar sentiments are shared by Partington (2012), who advocates that all educators be culturally competent and suggests that “teacher education institutions must incorporate programs in cultural competency in pre-service programs” (p. 445). Craven, Halse, Marsh and Wilson-Miller (2005) in the paper entitled *Teaching the mandatory Aboriginal studies*, presents a number of case studies of exemplary practices in pre-service teacher education. These provide a valuable reference for educators as courses are developed to address the area of cultural competence. The emphasis of the service-learning experience in the present study was on raising awareness of the Aboriginal culture that may in time lead to cultural competence, but does not fully explore all components of the definition of being culturally competent. Hence the term ‘cultural awareness’ has been chosen for the research study, in preference to that of “cultural competence”.

At a recent Australian Council for Educational Research conference, Professor Lorna Williams, from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, presented her research in the area of teacher development and collaborative learning. Professor Williams has long been involved in Indigenous education. The message from her research was strong and clear, “Educators need to experience Indigenous ways of learning and teaching to understand what they can do to incorporate these practices into their classes” (Williams, 2011, p. 16). She advocated the building of strong and sustainable connections between institutions and communities so that “learning is seen as purposeful and meaningful” and education is about developing the whole human being “that means that learning involves the heart, mind, body and spirit, and it is for the self, family, community, the land, ancestors and descendants” (p. 16). Williams believes that the building of relationships through time built into programs of mentorship or apprenticeships enhances the opportunities for pre-service teachers to
develop and understand Indigenous ways of learning. Hence the need for collaborative learning experiences between those in teacher education and Indigenous communities to help “reconcile two worlds, two ways of being … having a strong sense of identity can help to negotiate between the two worlds” (Williams, 2011, p. 16). The concept of cultural identity is further explored in the following section.

2.4.3 Cultural identity

Another aspect of cultural awareness is that of culture identity. Cultural identity plays an important role in the education of all children. It is essential that children have a strong sense of who they are and where they belong. It is acknowledged that cultural identity is closely linked to self-identity. Self-identity is crucial in how a child perceives him or herself and hence his/her ability to learn and succeed. Educators need to acknowledge the powerful influence they have on building a child’s self-identity. As stated in Partington (2005), “the more the child is different from the teacher, the more effort and time s/he will have to devote to learning about what motivates and interests that child and where that child is precisely, in terms of reading, writing and mathematics skills” (p. 270). A good teacher is able to reflect on how his/her own culture influences the assumptions and relationship with his/her students, and be able to determine appropriate strategies to address their needs. Essentially, a good teacher believes “that all children can learn and that s/he can make a difference” (Partington, 2005, p. 271). A teacher who portrays these expectations will enhance the self-identity of all students in the class, and thus their academic achievement.

The strengthening of self-identity is viewed as an essential goal for all Indigenous students. Such an identity can be developed through recognising one’s own self, heritage, culture and place in the world. It is essential that students view
themselves as successful readers, writers and speakers. In terms of Indigenous identity
Nakata (2007) argues strongly that “students’ sense of identity must include the future as well as the past: English literacy and understanding the world beyond our communities … is as critically important for our future survival as understanding our traditional pathways” (cited in “What works” program, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b, p. 4). It is advocated by Nakata (2007) that students develop literacy and language skills to enable them to have a strong sense of identity that will enable them to determine pathways for the future.

2.4.4 Cultural awareness: Conclusion

There are many concepts that could be explored through any review of literature in the area of cultural awareness; however, these are well beyond the scope of the present study. In essence, a definition has been discussed, with the importance of the area explored briefly, to support the context of the study into service-learning as a way of developing cultural awareness of the pre-service teachers working in an Aboriginal educational setting.

2.5 Pedagogy of literacy education

The pedagogy of literacy education as it relates to Aboriginal education is the final area under review. It is important to present some of the key research documents directing current pedagogy for literacy learning, as the focus of the phenomenological study was on ways of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, skills and awareness of literacy pedagogy. First requiring consideration is the place of literacy in the *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2009b). Literacy is recognised as “an essential skill for students in becoming successful
learners and as a foundation for success in all learning areas” (ACARA, 2013b, p. 1).

The importance of literacy is also recognised as central to all students’ learning through the rationale of the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2013a). It is stated that through the study of English “individuals learn to analyse, understand, communicate with and build relationships with others and with the world around them … develop the knowledge and skills needed for education, training and the workplace” (ACARA, 2013a, para.1). Thus in defining literacy, the words of Snyder (2002) as stated in *Silicon literacies* deserve consideration:

> We need an expanded definition which recognises that reading and writing, considered as print-based and logocentric, are only part of what people have to learn to be literate. Now, for the first time in history, the written, oral and audiovisual modalities of communication are integrated into multimodal hypertext systems made accessible via the Internet and the World Wide Web (p. 3).

Pre-service teachers are encouraged to develop their pedagogy of literacy teaching that encapsulates the wide range of multimodal literacies and practices that are essential for communication in the 21st century.

### 2.5.1 Literacy in the Australian Curriculum

Current views of literacy recognise the importance of students being able to integrate all the modes of language, to make sense or meaning of the text, and then to use these skills in a broad range of contexts. Such contexts enable students to demonstrate their essential literacy skills, especially in other learning areas and across the curriculum. Hence the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2013a) has a structure that recognises the essential curriculum for the teaching of English, through year level content and achievement standards. Complementing the content of the *Australian curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2013a) are the *General capabilities*
(ACARA, 2013b) that emphasise explicit literacy competency across all areas of the curriculum.

In view of the current research study, it is important to consider the place of an Aboriginal student’s home language as s/he learns to be literate in Standard Australian English: “It is important to acknowledge the home language, prior knowledge and experiences of these students and to build on these in developing students’ literacy capabilities in the curriculum” (ACARA, 2013b, p. 1). Much of the research documented through the “What works” program (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) reinforces the importance of acknowledging the Aboriginal student’s home language and culture as he/she learn in a school context. Further recommendations for promoting literacy success is presented in the What works. The work program: Core Issues 3: Literacy for succeeding at school” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b). A summary is presented in the paper that follows.

2.5.1.1 What works. The work program: Core issues 3

As recognised in the introduction to the Core Issues paper, many Indigenous students have low literacy levels, and teachers can be significantly challenged by the lack of skills of these students. The aim for any teacher ought to be to improve the literacy levels of the students to enable mastery in the essential skills of Standard Australian English, written and spoken. Hence three main goals are articulated in the paper essential for improving the literacy skills of Aboriginal students:

1. The development of the ability to encode and decode written text automatically;
2. The development of a broad repertoire of language practices; and,
3. The development of capability with ‘academic’ written and spoken English (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b, p. 2).
As stated in goal one, it is viewed as fundamental that students develop decoding and encoding skills to enable them to make meaning of texts. Teachers should develop literacy programs that address these fundamental skills, promoting automatic recall of language concepts, which in time should support comprehension of the written word.

Current literacy pedagogy promotes the definition of literacy as encompassing more than just the skills of reading, writing, spelling, speaking and listening. It is desirable for students to develop a range of language practices to enable them to critique, analyse and critically evaluate the texts of the 21st century (Freebody & Luke, 2003). Hence teachers should provide opportunity for students to engage with a variety of language experiences to achieve the second goal as stated above.

Students ought to be taught the discourse of specific disciplines to enable them to participate in the world outside of school. A sound knowledge and ability to use Standard Australian English is recognized as essential learning for all students if they are to attain “certification which can lead eventually to stable, well-remunerated jobs” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b, p. 3). Goal three stresses the need for students to be taught ‘academic’ literacy to enable full and effective participation in society.

Additional goals are discussed in the Core Issues 3 paper. These include the need for students to feel safe and welcome in the school, through a positive relationship with teachers and school staff. Students need to have a “voice in the values, beliefs and operation of the school” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b, p. 3). The term “Social inclusion and well being” is used to capture these concepts. Again, the importance of developing a strong sense of identity is viewed as another goal that is essential for
successful learning of literacy. Teachers ought to have high expectations of their students if students are to achieve to their full potential.

Engagement is also recognised as essential if students are to “commit the necessary brainpower to take on new learning and make sense of it” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009b, p. 4). Engagement can be promoted through learning that is linked to the students’ interests, world experiences or involves practical activities. However, it is stated that “student engagement is necessary but not sufficient for success in literacy” (2009b, p. 4). Teachers should have a sound knowledge and understanding of effective literacy pedagogical practices to maximise student learning outcomes across the curriculum.

To conclude, a “balanced approach” to the teaching of literacy is recommended through much of the research (Annandale, 2009a; Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005; Pressley, 2006). Such an approach includes the instructional practices of modelled, shared, guided and independent reading, where the teacher scaffolds the learning, building the student’s vocabulary, fluency and comprehension of the text. As stated in the Teaching reading: Report and recommendations (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005) teachers need to provide “systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction … equally … provide an integrated approach to reading that supports the development of oral language, vocabulary, grammar, reading fluency, comprehension and literacies of new technologies” (p. 38). Thus teachers ought to have a wide repertoire of teaching and learning approaches with sound pedagogical knowledge to address the needs of all individual students, both Indigenous and non-indigenous within the classroom. The development of personalised learning plans (PLP) has become a focus in Aboriginal education as a means of addressing these needs, thus
helping to close the gap in students’ achievement. As such, the following area of the literature review explores the beliefs and research underpinning the strategy of personalised learning plans.

2.5.1.2 What works. The work program. Core issues 10: Personalised learning plans

The Core Issues 10 paper assists teachers and schools in developing and delivering Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal students. The focus of a PLP is on “working with each student, in partnership with student’s parents or carers, to develop a plan that maps a pathway for students to achieve learning goals tailored to their developmental and motivational needs” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009e, p. 1). The key beliefs underpinning the concept of the PLP are that a difference can be made to each Aboriginal student’s achievement when a plan is made that targets the student’s level of achievement, respects his/her cultural identity, incorporates sound teaching practices, and seeks consistent participation by the student. The PLP process acknowledges the need to respect the background of the family, and their role as the “first educators of the students” (p. 3). In consultation with the family and student (when age-appropriate), the teacher develops a plan where specific learning goals are identified and documented. These learning goals may include “personal growth, social skills and cultural achievements” (p. 3). It is viewed as essential that the Aboriginal student has a “voice” in determining the learning goals and time-frame for achievement. The actions identified to achieve these goals ought to focus on the learner’s responsibilities, interests and needs while including specific teaching strategies that are culturally appropriate. Regular review and evaluation of the PLP is essential for successful implementation.
The report by Sebba, Brown, Steward, Galton and James (2007) entitled *An investigation of personalised learning approaches used by schools* found PLPs to be a positive intervention. The Report drew on the research of Hargreaves (2006), Ruddick et al. (2005) and Leadbeater (2005) stating that “personalised learning was characterized by high levels of participation of students and staff … learning to learn and pupil voice” (cited in Sebba, Brown, Steward, Galton & James, 2007, p. 5). It also enabled “deep learning” that was part of an ongoing process beyond just the acquisition of skills. As acknowledged in the Victorian Government report entitled *Personalised education: from research to policy and practice* (Education Policy and Research Division Office for Education Policy and Innovation, 2007), the concept of personalised education is only just emerging in Australia. However, such an approach is viewed as a key education reform that places the learner at the centre of the education, and seeks to respond more directly to the individual’s needs. Furthermore, the use of personalised learning plans has been strongly encouraged at a system level, with the Australian Government recommending that a PLP be developed for all Aboriginal students in schools. As stated by the Department of Education, Employment and Work Place Relations (2012c):

> Under newly established bilateral funding arrangements, state and territory governments are required to achieve improved results in relation to better educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Through this agreement all education sectors have committed to implement personalised learning plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (p. 1).

### 2.5 Literacy pedagogy: Conclusion

In reviewing the literature of the pedagogy of literacy education, the focus has been on key research relevant to the Australian education context. The Australian Curriculum has shaped the direction of literacy education for the 21st century. The definition of literacy is constantly evolving as new “literacies” are being explored and
developed. However, the need to be literate in Standard Australian English is a central goal for all students, and demands that educators explicitly teach the essential skills to enable success in all modes of language. Recent research in the teaching of these skills, with a specific review of documents relevant to Aboriginal education, advocates a “balanced approach” to the teaching of English and these concepts have been described.

2.6 Chapter summary

The purpose of the research into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education seeks to explore whether such a methodology will enable pre-service teachers to demonstrate achievement of the National professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2011). As shown in Table 2.1: National professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2011) it is expected that pre-service teachers will be competent in teaching strategies effective for the diversity of students, particularly Aboriginal students, promoting reconciliation through an understanding and respect for Aboriginal culture and be proficient in the content and pedagogy of literacy teaching. Key literature has been presented across these areas: education policies, service-learning, Aboriginal education, cultural awareness, and literacy education to inform the research study.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Chapter Three presents an overview of the research methodology for the study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. It describes the theoretical framework and research process using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

3.1 Theoretical framework

The philosophical stance that underpins the study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions, and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education fits into the epistemology of qualitative research. It follows from a qualitative perspective that the theoretical approach undertaken holds to a social constructivist view, and is congruent with a phenomenological study. Accordingly, the research design was structured along phenomenological lines. Each aspect in Figure 3.1culminates to present an overview of the theoretical framework.

Figure 3.1: Theoretical Framework for the Research Study
3.1.1 Epistemology

The underlying assumptions of a qualitative research, using a social constructivist approach may be summarised in three statements:

1. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views.

2. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and background.

3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, rising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

Additional characteristics of qualitative research are listed in Creswell (2009) and these helped to confirm the decision to use a qualitative research methodology. These included: data collection in a natural setting; researcher as the gatherer of information; the use of multiple forms of data collection; analysis through identifying themes, patterns and building of information, frequently through a deductive process; and participants’ views as central to the meaning of the research process. It is acknowledged that in qualitative research, the research design may emerge throughout the experience and be reflected in the theoretical view of the study. In essence, “qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem … reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (Creswell, 2009, p. 176).

Qualitative research can be viewed from different philosophical perspectives. The present research holds to Interpretivism, an approach that “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 2010,
Such an approach is closely linked to the work of Max Weber (1864-1920), “who suggested that in human science we are concerned with Verstehen-understanding” (cited in Crotty, 2010, p. 67). Interpretivism is further explained as “rooted in an empathetic understanding or Verstehen, of everyday lived experience of people in specific historical settings” (Neuman, 2006, p. 87). Thus interpretivism was the research approach that enabled the lived experiences of the pre-service teacher participants to be documented through qualitative data collection and consequent analysis of the phenomena.

Qualitative research was undertaken holding to the belief that such a paradigm would reveal a holistic perspective appropriate for addressing the research questions. An approach that considers the views of the participants as they live and work in the world is congruent with a social constructivist epistemology. Through interacting with the participants in the lived experience, the researcher looked at the “complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Thus the aim of the research was to make sense of the service-learning experience through the interpretations of those participating directly within the Aboriginal educational setting. In summary, the philosophical assumption underpinning the qualitative research holds to an epistemology congruent with a social constructivist viewpoint, and theoretical perspective of Interpretivism. Such an approach is further reflected through a theoretical perspective of phenomenology.

3.1.2 Theoretical Perspective

From an historical viewpoint, the philosophy of phenomenology is attributed to the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) with more recent discussion documented in
the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1962) in *Phenomenology of Perception* (cited in Creswell, 2009). Researchers using a phenomenological approach, “search for the essential, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasise the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning” (Creswell, 2009, p. 52). Phenomenologists “generally assume ... there is some commonality to the perceptions that human beings have in how they interpret similar experiences, and they seek to identify, understand, and describe these commonalities” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 437). By adopting a phenomenological research methodology, the researcher sought to find the common “essential characteristics” of the service-learning experience from the point of view of the pre-service teachers, and the impact on their perceptions, knowledge and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education.

As is the intention in a phenomenological study, the researcher attempted to put aside preconceived ideas and to look afresh at the information that was gathered from the participants in the phenomena experienced (Crotty, 1998). It is acknowledged by Bednall (2006) that the success of a research study is dependent on the design and procedures applied to manage the “epoche and bracketing” of the researcher’s subjectivity in data interpretation (ibid, p. 126). Use of a research journal was adopted by the researcher to record potential bias, personal dispositions or judgements that may impede the data interpretation process. The researcher observed the pre-service teachers as they participated in the service-learning phenomena at the Aboriginal educational setting and noted the interactions, discussions and behaviours displayed while teaching in the diagnostic literacy clinic. As observations were made in the field notes, the researcher attempted to remain conscious of misinterpretations and bias and hence,
highlighted problematic statements for careful consideration during the analysis and interpretation process.

There are five major procedural considerations in a phenomenological study according to Creswell (2009). These are summarised as:

1. A philosophical perspective termed *epoche* that demands the researcher “brackets his or her preconceived ideas about the phenomenon to understand it through the voices of the informants” (p. 54).

2. Through the investigation, the researcher constructs research questions that “explore the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks individuals to describe their everyday lived experiences” (p. 54).

3. Data is collected from individuals who have “experienced the phenomenon under investigation through in-depth interviews and other self reflection strategies” (p. 54).

4. Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through “the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings”. Other protocols are used and termed “horizontalization … clusters of meaning … textual description … and structural description …” (p. 55).

5. Finally the phenomenological report “ends with the reader understanding better the essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the experience, recognising that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists” (p. 55).

Using phenomenology, the researcher sought to gain insight into the participants’ knowledge, perceptions, and cultural awareness through service-learning in an Aboriginal education setting. The researcher collected data concerning the reactions and perceptions of those involved in the service-learning experience of teaching in a diagnostic literacy clinic in an Aboriginal educational setting, through observations and field notes, in-depth interviewing and journal reflections. The aim was to address the research questions through a descriptive narrative that would ultimately provide insight into the value of the strategy for furthering the development of the key graduate competencies necessary for the education of Aboriginal students.
3.1.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was deemed as congruent with the epistemology of phenomenological research and thus chosen as the basis of data analysis. The aim of the research from an IPA perspective was to “focus upon people’s experiences and/or understanding of particular phenomena” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 46). As such, the research into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, sought to elicit the pre-service teachers’ experience and understanding of the phenomena. As is the practice of qualitative data analysis, the process is “iterative, involving a back-and-forth process between data collection and data analysis” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 251). Thus, there is an ongoing process of data collection, coding and analysis, that eventually reveals the essence or themes of the research study. This process is described as “a series of spirals as we loop back and forth through various phases within the broader progress of the analysis” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 252). The researcher makes connections between the data, categorises, links concepts, re-reads initial information to confirm the themes emerging from the research experience.

Practical guidelines to data analysis have made IPA an accessible methodology for early researchers. Smith (2004), who outlined a set of strategies and principles to guide the researcher, emphasised that there is not one way to analyse the phenomenological study; however, three alliterative parts are characteristic features of IPA: “idiographic, inductive, and interrogative” (Smith, 2004, p. 41). First, IPA is viewed as strongly idiographic, “starting with the detailed examination of one case until some degree of closure or gestalt has been achieved …” (ibid, p. 41) and then repeating the process for the next case. It is only when a close analysis of each case has been
achieved that there is an “attempt to conduct a cross-case analysis” for themes that are common or divergent (Smith, 2004, p. 41). Such was the approach followed in the current study whereby the data collected on each pre-service teacher was examined case by case, and week by week throughout the phenomenon, and finally culminating in an examination of the participant’s post-interview. The themes began emerging as the process continued across the analysis of twenty four participant’s interviews, journals and learning logs. The data analysed from the educational providers served to strengthen the emerging themes.

Second, inductive techniques are used by IPA in ways that are flexible and allow for unanticipated outcomes. IPA does not attempt to “verify or negate specific hypotheses established on the basis of the extant literature” rather to explore broad research questions and seek extensive data in the process (Smith, 2004, p. 43). Through detailed analysis of the emerging themes, the study began to address the research questions related to the personal and professional knowledge of the participants; their perceptions of Aboriginal people; literacy education in an Aboriginal context; and cultural awareness. The essence of the service-learning experience emerged as a crucial component associated with each of the emergent themes.

The final and third component is that of being interrogative. A key aim of IPA is “to make a contribution to psychology through interrogating or illuminating existing research” and this is done by linking the results of analysis to discussion of “extant psychological literature” (Smith, 2004, p. 44). With the emergent themes of teacher efficacy, Aboriginal education, literacy pedagogy, cultural awareness and competence, within the framework of service-learning, links to relevant research and literature were investigated. It is anticipated that the findings and recommendations of the study will
contribute to the literature on service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Introduction

A qualitative methodology was used whereby the direct experiences of the participants formed the basis of the study and data collection. The aim was to gain “detailed, thick description; inquiry in depth; and direct quotations capturing people’s personal perspectives and experiences” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 433). The researcher used a phenomenological research strategy, whereby the essence of the experiences was identified and described while acknowledging the need for a non-judgemental, neutral stance to any information or experience that was shared (Creswell, 2009). The links within the methodology can be seen in Figure 3.2.

*Figure 3.2. Links between the key components of the phenomenological research*
The phenomenological research was centred on an elective unit of study entitled Diagnostic literacy clinic within a service-learning context that was part of the Bachelor of Education degree at The University of Notre Dame Australia. Although a member of the university staff, the researcher was not involved in the organising or delivery of the service-learning experience in the year of the research study. The initial trial of the course of study in the preceding year at the Aboriginal College, informed the structure of the elective unit. The design structure and organisation of the service-learning unit was established through negotiation with the university staff, Principal and School Literacy Coordinator. The elective unit required pre-service teachers to work with a peer, planning and conducting weekly two hour literacy teaching sessions. These sessions were delivered at an educational setting with Aboriginal students over a period of ten weeks. After each literacy teaching session, pre-service teachers participated in a service-learning tutorial for one hour with university staff. During the tutorial session, the university staff facilitated a debriefing of the experience with the pre-service teachers, incorporating structured reflection. Prior to participating in the tutoring sessions, the pre-service teachers attended an induction and orientation of the service-learning experience where staff from both the university and educational institution providing background to the experience. The components of the service-learning experience, cultural awareness, literacy intervention, and the Aboriginal educational institution were discussed. As a phenomenological research, the total service-learning experience was viewed as the phenomena under investigation. The research questions of the investigation relate to the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development, cultural awareness, literacy pedagogy, and Aboriginal education. The educational benefits perceived by the staff at the Aboriginal College also formed part of the service-learning experience.
3.2.2 Sample Selection

Purposive sampling was used for sample selection as the technique involved “selecting certain units or cases based on a specific purpose rather than randomly” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 173). The researcher sought to generate a wealth of information from a small number of participants and hence it was crucial that this be gained through purposive sampling. Four main characteristics of purposive sampling are outline by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) and include:

- … sampling addresses specific purposes related to research questions: therefore, the researcher selects cases that are information rich in regard to those questions
- … samples are often selected using expert judgment of researchers and informants
- … procedures focus on “depth” of information that can be generated by individual cases
- … typically small (usually 30 or fewer cases), but the specific sample size depends on the type of qualitative research being conducted and the research question (p. 173).

A purposive sampling of those participating in the phenomena was selected, and described by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), as “intensity sampling” (p. 175). Sampling of this nature is termed as “criterion” by Creswell (2009) as all participants met the criterion of experiencing the phenomenon (p. 118). All the pre-service teachers participating in the elective unit Diagnostic literacy clinic within a service-learning context were invited to be a part of the service-learning research study. The twelve early childhood and twelve primary teachers accepted the invitation to be participants in the research study. Key stakeholders at the Aboriginal College also volunteered to participate in the study; the Principal, Literacy Coordinator, Teacher Assistant and School Chaplain. The researcher deemed it important for the outcomes of the service-learning experience to seek the perspectives of the educators working in the Aboriginal College. Such information was viewed as essential, in terms of “reciprocity” of a
service-learning experience (Jacoby, 1996). The Aboriginal students were not direct participants in the study; however background information shared, with permission of the Principal, was included to build a more comprehensive picture of the context of the study. A de-identified aggregate of the Aboriginal college students’ results was made available to the researcher for the inclusion in the study. Further information about each of the participant groups is outlined below.

3.2.3 University of Notre Dame pre-service teachers

Twenty four students were recruited as participants in the research study. Table 3.1 summarises details of the participants, giving background information as to the pre-service teachers’ degree of study, gender, age and previous practicum placements and contact with Aboriginal people. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the participants to maintain confidentiality. As foreshadowed in the introduction of the thesis, the pre-service teachers were in the third year of study in either a primary or early childhood degree. These pre-service teachers were viewed as competent in essential literacy teaching pedagogy having completed three literacy units of study with at least twenty weeks of classroom practicum experience. Although the service-learning experience was based in a secondary Aboriginal college, the early childhood and primary pre-service teachers were viewed as the most appropriate tutors for the secondary students who had low literacy levels. The elective unit was also a part of the primary and early childhood course; however, it was not available for secondary students due to other course commitments.

There were twenty three female pre-service teachers, and only one male pre-service teacher in the study. The imbalance of the genders is typical of the cohort of females and males who study to be early childhood and primary teachers. Also of
interest to the study was the mix of ages of the pre-service teachers; the majority of pre-service teachers aged in their early twenties, with three mature-aged (MA) females about forty years of age. All pre-service teachers were of Anglo-Saxon background and had varied experiences with Aboriginal people. Of the twenty four participants, thirteen of the pre-service teachers had never spoken with an Aboriginal person. The other eleven pre-service teachers had different degrees of contact with Aboriginal people determined by their living locality, school experiences, family and friends.

Table 3.1

Summary of pre-service teachers’ details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Pseudonym</th>
<th>Degree of Study</th>
<th>Location of previous practicum placement</th>
<th>Previous experience with Aboriginal people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Male-M)</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education/ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mature –aged MA)</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>Remote Aboriginal School</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Elena</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Remote Aboriginal School</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Grace (MA)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cade (M)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Georgia</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Alexandra</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Linda</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Elisabeth</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Remote Aboriginal School</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Hannah</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Sarah (MA)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Kate</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Gayle</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Remote Aboriginal School</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Mary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Some experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Nelly</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Some experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Julie</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Karen (MA)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Casey</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Vivian</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Remote Aboriginal School</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Helen</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Remote Aboriginal School</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Lea</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Betty</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Clare</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Jimi</td>
<td>Primary</td>
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<td>Some experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Samantha</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Remote Aboriginal Community</td>
<td>Extensive experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Elle</td>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>No experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Participants were studying for the degree of Bachelor of Education ECE/Primary. Previous practicum placements were recorded and information on the experience with Aboriginal students. Gender and mature-aged participants are noted.

3.2.4 Aboriginal College staff

Four staff members from the Aboriginal educational setting who were key stakeholders in the service-learning partnership participated in the study. In essence, the
staff members played an intermediary role, identifying and designing the service-learning experience to address the needs of the Aboriginal students. These participants included the School Principal, Literacy Coordinator, Teacher Assistant, and School Chaplain.

The School Principal had been instrumental in negotiating the service-learning partnership between the Aboriginal College and The University of Notre Dame Australia. He had overseen the development of the service-learning program, selecting key staff members to coordinate the running of the program on the school site. The principal also participated in the orientation session at the Aboriginal college and spoke of his vision for the program partnership across the two educational institutions. He regularly observed the weekly sessions when the program was underway and interacted with the pre-service teachers and Aboriginal students. He maintained regular contact with the university staff, and shared his perceptions of the program. Thus it was deemed important for the study to gain the Principal’s view of the experience, and he willingly participated in a formal interview as part of the study.

The Literacy Coordinator also agreed to be a participant in the study as he was directly involved in the structure of the service-learning program, and the weekly organisation. As the Literacy Coordinator, he was responsible for selecting the Aboriginal students who would participate in the service-learning program. He also managed the students’ literacy records and provided a profile of the Aboriginal students to each of the pre-service teachers, prior to commencement of the program. It was the Literacy Coordinator who also designed the program outcomes and instigated the “My Story” project, a focus of the tutoring sessions. His attendance and mentoring during the service-learning experience was invaluable for the pre-service teachers. He also
played a key role in the induction session for the pre-service teachers, sharing his expertise in Aboriginal education and cultural awareness. Consequently, the researcher believed that the Literacy Coordinator’s perspective on the service-learning program was important for the “reciprocity” of the service-learning experience, addressing research question four: What do the educational providers perceive as the benefits of the pre-service teachers’ input?

The third staff member invited as a participant in the study was the Teacher Assistant who worked directly with the Aboriginal students to support them in their daily classes. She had a very close relationship with the students, and also coordinated the MULTI-LIT (Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy) instructional program (Macquarie University, 2012). Many of the students she regularly taught in the MULTI-LIT program were selected to be in the service-learning program with the pre-service teachers. It was through her initiative that a questionnaire was devised to elicit the views of the Aboriginal students as to their perceptions of the program with the pre-service teachers. Permission was gained from the students and college to use the de-identified and aggregated responses of the questionnaires. During the interview conducted with the Teacher Assistant as part of the study, she shared these results with the researcher.

The School Chaplain was another staff member who offered to be interviewed as part of the study. He had been employed at the Aboriginal College for about 12 years and had seen many changes during this time. He regularly observed the service-learning program and interacted with the Aboriginal students and staff on a daily basis. His perceptions of the program as an observer were sought during the formal interview as a participant in the study. The School Librarian also contributed to the study through comments recorded by a participant in a pre-service teacher’s reflective journal.
3.2.5 Aboriginal college students

Although the Aboriginal students were not formal participants in the study, it was viewed as important to the context of the study to document some background information integral to the service-learning program. Twenty four students from the Aboriginal College were selected to participate in the service-learning experience by the Literacy Coordinator. These students were from classes Year 9 to Year 12, with twenty two males and two females. They were selected by the Literacy Coordinator as students who had low literacy skills and were deemed to benefit from the one-to-one experience of working with the pre-service teachers. Students’ reading ages prior to the service-learning experience ranged from five years to ten years of age, however chronologically these students were aged from 14 years to 17 years of age. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the Aboriginal students to preserve the confidentiality of their identity. Students also came from communities across Western Australia, from Derby, Looma, Fitzroy Crossing, Balgo Hills, Kununurra, One-Arm Point and Halls Creek, and some from metropolitan areas. Most of the students in the service-learning program were attending the Aboriginal College as boarders with only a few being day students. Many of the students spoke English as a second language, being fluent in their home language.

3.2.6 Procedure

Multiple methods of data collection are often used in qualitative research and this process of “triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Triangulation is defined as “cross-checking of data using multiple data sources or multiple data collection procedures” (Frankel & Wallen, 2003, p.G-8). Such an approach is viewed as a strategy “that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, a number of different forms of data collection were
used including observations and field notes; semi-structured interviews prior to, and at the conclusion of the study. Reflective journals were maintained during the ten week experience together with learning logs that recorded the weekly tutoring lessons. Additional information was shared with the researcher relevant to the Aboriginal students in the study, by the staff of the Aboriginal College. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the data collection strategy from groups of participants.

Table 3.2

*Overview of data collection strategies for groups of participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Reflective Journal</th>
<th>Learning Logs</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Field Notes and Research Journal</th>
<th>Additional data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDA pre-service teachers</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal College students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Indirectly through a questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal College staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A schedule was planned prior to the commencement of the study to facilitate systematic and comprehensive compilation of the data collected. It also ensured participants were fully informed of their commitment in being a part of the research study. Table 3.3 outlines the schedule and methods used throughout the study.
Table 3.3

Data collection schedule and methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2 weeks prior to the service-learning experience | • Semi-structured individual interviews with 24 participants (pre-service teachers)  
|                                       | • Field notes                                                          |
|                                       | • Research journal                                                     |
| 10 week service-learning experience in an Aboriginal educational setting | • Observations recorded as field notes by the researcher                |
|                                       | • Reflective journal entries by 24 participants                         |
|                                       | • Learning logs by 24 participants                                      |
|                                       | • Field notes                                                          |
|                                       | • Research journal                                                     |
| 2 weeks after the conclusion of service-learning experience | • Post semi-structured individual interviews with 24 participant (pre-service teachers)  
|                                       | • Semi-structured interviews with 4 staff participants from the Aboriginal educational institution: Principal, Literacy Coordinator, Teacher Assistant, School Chaplain  
|                                       | • Field notes                                                          |
|                                       | • Research journal                                                     |

*Note.* The schedule of data collection is shown throughout the phenomenological study. The methods of data collection are listed indicating who used each tool.

Each of the methods of data collection used in the study is described: observations (field notes and research journal); interviews; reflective journals; and learning logs.

*Observations*

Field notes were made by the researcher using an “observational protocol” (Creswell, 2009, p. 181) that enabled the recording of behaviours and activities of the participants in the study. The researcher gathered field notes as “participant-as-observer” enabling key information to be recorded as it occurred throughout the service-learning experience in the Aboriginal educational setting. By acting as a “participant-as-observer”, the researcher spends “extended time with the group as an insider and tells members they are being studied” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 214). An advantage of taking the role of “participant-as-observer” was that the researcher sought feedback.
from participants during the service-learning experience, thus minimising misrepresentation of observations. Although being a “participant as observer” may be viewed as a weakness in the data collection, in that participants may be constrained in their behaviour, Johnson and Christensen (2008) believe that this problem “usually disappears as the people begin to trust the researcher” (p. 214). Other means of maintaining validity are discussed in the section on Trustworthiness and Dependability.

Data were recorded using an observation recording sheet, divided in the middle to enable “descriptive notes (portraits of participants, a reconstruction of dialogue, accounts of particular events and activities) from reflective notes … and demographic information about time, place, and date of the field setting … ” (Creswell, 2009, p.181).

*Research Journal*

The researcher was always conscious of the need to “bracket” or “minimise, the imposition of the researcher’s pre-suppositions and constructions on the data” throughout the entire study (Crotty, 2010, p. 83). “Bracketing” is also aligned with the term *epoche*, described by Bednall (2006) as “as a state of mind” that demands the researcher makes a conscious effort to employ procedures to minimise potential bias (p. 129). These pre-suppositions and constructions “might impinge on the research area and which need ‘tying down’” (Lukiv, 2004, cited in Bednall, 2006, p. 129). Whilst making observations and recording field notes, the researcher endeavoured to identify and avoid any value judgements based on previous experiences and bias. Such items were highlighted in the field notes, and highlighted to avoid pre-suppositions in both the data collection and analysis.

Similarly, the researcher also maintained a research journal that was used for notes and commentary throughout the study, especially following the many interviews.
The researcher “quickly entered ... immediate thoughts and perceptions on a range of matters, such as where the application of *epoche* seemed necessary or some themes of common significance were developing” (Bednall, 2006, p. 130). The research journal proved a valuable strategy and tool, enabling the researcher to maintain a high level of self-consciousness, and critical reflection throughout the study. It was a procedure specifically implemented to enable “bracketing ... the mental exercise in which the researcher identifies and then sets aside taken for granted assumptions” (Neuman, 2006, p. 106).

*Interviews*

Interviewing is regarded as a primary source of data collection in a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2009). Interviews from an IPA perspective “invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 57). As a qualitative researcher interviewing is considered the most important data-collection technique. The purpose of interviewing participants was to “find out what is on their mind: what they think, or how they feel about something” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 455). Interviews may be of four different types: structured, semi-structured, informal, and retrospective. Although defined as separate interview types, the various forms may merge during the interview process. Semi-structured interviews (Appendix E) were used that enabled specific information to be elicited from the participants, with the researcher able to probe for in-depth explanations and clarification of the concepts discussed. The interview questions were trialled through the pilot study and adopted for the research study as the questions were effective in eliciting key information related to the four research questions.
The primary purpose of the initial semi-structured interview was to find out about the knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of the pre-service teachers involved in the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal educational setting prior to the commencement of the phenomenological study. Post-interviewing enabled the researcher to follow up the pre-service teachers’ responses after participating in the ten week experience. Semi-structured interviews “are often best conducted at the end of a study, as they tend to shape responses to the researcher’s perceptions of how things are” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 456). Such a strategy enabled the researcher to affirm the essence of the phenomena, thus addressing the research questions. Post-interviews were held with all participants following the completion of the service-learning experience. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed for member checking by the researcher. Such an approach was taken with the view that the researcher wanted to be fully immersed in the individual experience of each participant “unwilling to allow any other individual to stand between me and the data” (Bednall, 2006, p. 130). Becoming intimately connected with the individual experiences of each participant also made the researcher very conscious yet again, of the need to ‘bracket’ her own judgements and bias. The research journal entries enabled the researcher to record anecdotal information relevant to the participants and to highlight the uniqueness of the experience for many individuals.

In planning for data collection using interviewing techniques, Creswell (2009) recommended that consideration be given to six important elements. First, the type of interview that is practical and will elicit useful information; second, using appropriate and effective recording procedures; and third, developing an interview protocol of open-ended questions. Also for consideration is the sourcing of an appropriate place for the interview to be conducted. Consent forms for the interviewees needed to be available
prior to the interview; and the interviewer must maintain focus on the questions and listen to the responses of the participants. Each of the aspects was considered in the research process undertaken through this study.

Interviews were digitally recorded with the researcher also making notes on information shared. À la Creswell (2009), an interview schedule (Appendix D: Interview schedule) was used with the following components:

- Date, place, time, interviewer, interviewee
- Introduction / Ice breaker
- Key questions
- Probe questions for follow up information and elaboration
- Space for responses between questions
- A thank-you statement to conclude noting the opportunity for member checking of information (p. 183).

A copy of the initial interview and post interview questions given to the pre-service teachers can be found in Appendix E: Interview questions. The questions for the pre and post-experience were carefully framed to enable the researcher to connect the responses of each participant prior to and at the conclusion of the phenomenon, thus assisting in the analysis of the impact of the service-learning experience. The interview questions were structured to elicit information that would provide insight into service-learning experience. School staff members participating in the study were also questioned during a semi-structured interview. The schedule of questions for the semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix F: Staff interview questions.

Whilst conducting the interviews, the researcher always followed the script that was constructed for each interview, to minimise any misinterpretation and avoid personal commentary. However, as stated by Bednall (2006), “keeping my personal views and experiences separate from data collection [was] more challenging than I had
anticipated” (ibid, p. 130). Similar issues were also acknowledged by the researcher in the current study. As mentioned previously, the strategy of maintaining a personal journal helped to document these issues, and maintain *epoche* as far as possible. For example, the researcher had to consciously refrain from commenting on the pre-service teachers’ competence in engaging with the Aboriginal students, to avoid influencing the pre-service teacher’s perception of the service-learning. Using the journal enabled the researcher to record observations without directing the participant’s interview responses.

**Reflective Journals**

The third method of data collection was through reflective journals compiled by the participants during the investigation. Each participant completed a journal entry after each weekly diagnostic literacy clinic, within the Aboriginal educational setting, using focus questions discussed in the service-learning tutorial. The reflective journals were collected at the conclusion of the ten week service-learning experience, and used as part of the document review. A copy of the weekly journal reflection format provided for optional use is included in Appendix H: Weekly Journal Reflection Framework. The results of the journal responses are documented in Chapter Four. Analysis of the reflective journals was made through the coding of themes, as is the protocol of qualitative research and these findings are presented in the discussion in Chapter Five.

**Learning Logs**

Pre-service teachers were expected to maintain a Learning Log of the weekly lesson planned and taken during the ten week service-learning experience. These Learning Logs were used as another source of data throughout the study and provided valuable information on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, skills and understanding.
in addressing the literacy needs of the Aboriginal students with whom they were working. Reflections were also entered in the Learning Logs by the pre-service teachers, specifically focused on the success or challenges of the teaching sessions. These provided another valuable source of data to inform the study.

Additional data

A short questionnaire providing feedback on the experience of working with the pre-service teacher was given by the Teacher Assistant to the Aboriginal students in the service-learning program. The aggregated responses of the questionnaires were given to the researcher during the interviews conducted with the Teacher Assistant. Permission was given by the Principal to use the information from the Aboriginal students in the study. These questionnaires were useful in gaining a limited perception of the service-learning experience from the point-of-view of the Aboriginal students. However, it signals the potential of further research in studying the impact of service-learning that also includes the student voice.

3.2.7 Data analysis

The data analysis of the phenomenological study of service learning as a methodology for developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education used the protocol of qualitative analysis, examining “entities from many perspectives until the essence of the phenomenon is revealed” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 255). An IPA methodology was used, thus the analysis of the study involved the coding of field notes; individual interviews (pre and post); reflective journal entries; and learning logs, compiled weekly throughout the phenomena. The data enabled themes to be identified for discussion relevant to the research questions. In the work of Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), six steps are listed
to guide the researcher using an IPA. These are summarised and linked to the current study.

**IPA steps in data analysis**

Step 1: “Reading and re-reading of the original data” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 82). Transcription of interviews was completed by the researcher to enable a full and comprehensive picture of the ‘lived experience’ of each of the pre-service teachers. Such a process assisted the researcher to be fully immersed in the dialogue of the individual participants. Each of the interview questions were matched across the participants to gain a sense of commonality across the responses. Post-interview responses of individual participants were aligned with the pre-interview responses to enable interpretation of the service-learning experience.

Step 2: “Initial noting” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 83). The researcher noted any points of interest, semantic links or uses of language that may support later development of themes. As familiarity developed with the transcripts, the researcher was able to become more interpretative in annotations, and developed a deeper understanding of the individual’s experiences. Such an approach was used with each form of data collected; interviews, reflective journals, learning logs and field notes.

Step 3: “Developing emergent themes” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 91). Once the researcher had a sense of the participants’ experiences, initial noting of patterns and ideas, and emergent themes become apparent. The themes reflected “not only the participant’s original words and thoughts, but also the analyst’s interpretation” (p. 92). Each of the themes that emerged from analysis of the weekly data began to address the research questions related to the personal and professional development of the pre-
service teachers; knowledge of Aboriginal culture; literacy pedagogy; Aboriginal education; and service-learning. Other themes also emerged beyond the parameters of the research questions, as presented in Chapter 5.

Step 4: “Searching for connections across emergent themes” (p. 92). In addressing the connection of emergent themes, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) encourage the researcher to be innovative and creative in such a process. The overall research questions guided the process of analysis with some themes being developed extensively and others discarded. The research journal with its jottings, notes and visual frameworks supported the researcher in the interpretation of these themes and assisted in the ‘bracketing’ of the service-learning experience.

Step 5: “Moving to the next case” (p. 100). As the researcher considers subsequent cases, the need for “bracketing the ideas emerging from analysis of the first case while working on the second case” is essential (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 100). The researcher was systematic in the analysis process, by following the steps outlined in IPA, to minimise the impact of her own interpretations, ensuring the individuality of the experience from the point of view of each participant. As stated previously, the strategy of maintaining a research journal, and field notes was used to minimise the subjectivity and bias of the researcher.

Step 6: “Looking for patterns across cases” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 101). At this stage in the IPA process, the researcher moved to a more theoretical level of interpretation, with themes and subordinate themes emerging from the data. Thus the themes were translated into a narrative account of both the individual and the collective group. Visual representation of the themes assisted the researcher to synthesise the data
and conceptualise the outcomes of the study. Figure 3.3 depicts the cycle of data analysis using an IPA methodology.

![Diagram of data analysis cycle](image)

**Figure 3.3** Cycle of data analysis showing the steps for interpretation related to each phase of the study

Conclusions and recommendations emerged from the findings with issues for further research also arising from the phenomenon of service-learning. As stated “the research, for the phenomenologist, is this very attempt to break free and see the world afresh” (Crotty, 1998, p. 86). Hence the research study aimed to explore the impact of the service-learning experience on pre-service teachers in terms of their knowledge, perceptions, skill and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Chapter 4, 5 and 6 presents the results, findings and concluding insights of the study.

**Timing and Duration**

The research into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ perceptions, knowledge and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, was conducted
over a fourteen-week period, ten weeks being direct experience with the Aboriginal students, and two weeks pre and post-tutorial sessions. After an initial two-week induction, pre-service teachers attended a weekly, two-hour diagnostic literacy clinic with Aboriginal students, at an Aboriginal educational setting. Following the tutoring session, the pre-service teachers participated in a one-hour tutorial session at the Aboriginal educational setting, focused on service-learning reflection, conducted by suitably qualified University lecturers. Data were collected throughout the service-learning experience as per the schedule, in Table 3.3.

3.2.8 Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers need to have procedures in place to ensure the research study undertaken is “plausible, credible, trustworthy and therefore defensible”. Such consideration is termed “research validity or trustworthiness” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 275). Trustworthiness is important as it will determine the accuracy of the findings from the position of the “researcher, the participant, or the readers” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) “trustworthiness … is defined as the extent to which an inquirer can persuade audiences that his or her findings are “worth paying attention to” (cited in Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 296). Strategies to promote the trustworthiness of qualitative research have been well documented in research. Johnson & Christensen (2008) identify and describe fifteen different strategies, while Creswell (2009) discusses eight primary methods of improving trustworthiness. For the purpose of the present the following strategies were implemented to promote trustworthiness:

- Data was sourced using a number of different instruments including observations, field notes, pre and post-interviews, reflective journals and
participants’ learning logs. This is termed “triangulation” and enabled evidence from multiple sources to support the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 276). Triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, and external auditing are procedures that added rigor to the investigation.

- Member checking was undertaken by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Hence the final transcripts were shared with the pre-service teachers to determine whether they felt that the service-learning experience and their knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education was accurately portrayed. The recipients of the intervention at the Aboriginal College were also given their transcripts to confirm their perspectives of the pre-service teachers’ input.

- Extensive fieldwork was undertaken by the researcher over a period of 16-18 weeks, inclusive of the service-learning experience, to ensure a rich comprehensive description of the event, and to build trust with the participants and recipients at the educational setting.

- Thick, rich description of the service-learning experience was written to enable the reader to envisage the setting, learning activities, pre-service teachers’ behaviours, actions and responses to the tutoring of Aboriginal students within the educational setting. Direct quotations from the pre-service teachers’ journals, interviews and field notes were used to support the trustworthiness of the findings.
Reflexivity is the acknowledgement of researcher bias that may be brought to the study, and hence through self-reflection, and self-awareness these aspects were managed openly and honestly in the interpretation of the findings. A research journal was maintained by the researcher as a means of “bracketing” thus avoiding potential bias.

Negative or discrepant information must be presented as “information that contradicts the general perspectives of the themes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). Furthermore such information helps to ensure a comprehensive account of the research study and makes it realistic and thus valid.

Peer debriefing was undertaken by the researcher to ensure an accurate account of the service-learning experience and interpretations made. This person challenged the researcher thus helping to provide insight into the potential biases and pre-dispositions apparent in the conclusions (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

An external auditor was used to review the entire research study. Through an audit of the research methodology, valuable feedback was gained to support the trustworthiness of the service-learning experience as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education (Creswell, 2009).

3.2.9 Dependability

In qualitative research the term “dependability” has been used to equate with the term “reliability” from quantitative research. As defined by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), dependability is “concerned with the extent to which variation in a phenomenon
of interest can be explained consistently using the ‘human instrument’ across different contexts” (p. 333). To ensure the consistency of results across the inquiry into pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, the researcher maintained a reflective journal to document possible bias, or changes that could impact on the study, thus ensuring “bracketing or epoche”. As stated by Bednall (2006), procedures need to be designed and applied to address the “operation of epoche and bracketing” of potential subjectivity and bias (p. 125). Peer briefing and an external audit, as planned above to ensure trustworthiness, also helped maintain the dependability of the research study.

3.2.10 Ethical considerations

Due consideration was given to all aspects of the research study to maintain the highest standard of professional and ethical conduct and the following strategies were adopted:

- All care and effort was taken to ensure that the identity of each participant was protected and that the information collected would in no way harm or embarrass those involved.
- The purpose of the study was made known to the participants and their right to withdraw from the research without penalty or prejudice was explained and upheld at all times.
- Confidentiality of identity was assured by the use of pseudonyms in all data collection, transcription and analysis.
- Written permission was obtained from all participants in the research study to use the data gathered.
• Transcriptions of the interviews were given to each participant for verification of the accuracy of the content.

• The final report was presented to participants to validate the findings and conclusions.

• Application for the approval of Research with Minimal Risk was submitted to The University of Notre Dame Australia and the Western Australian Catholic Education Office through the appropriate process and permission granted (Appendix 1).

3.2.11 Dual and Unequal Relationships

The researcher was aware of the dual relationship that existed between the pre-service teachers undertaking the unit within the Bachelor of Education course of study, and the researcher as the literacy coordinator. In working as a psychologist, Zur (2000) defined “dual relationship” as it “refers to any situation where multiple roles exist between a therapist and a client” (p. 98). As such, a dual relationship may be viewed as exploitation, and a misuse of power for personal gain. However, Zur (2000) refuted this perception and wrote “in praise of dual relationships … as being helpful, healthy and a normal and complex factor in all daily lives” (p. 99). He further addressed “power differential”, and argued that both are not “inherently exploitative” (Zur, 2000, p. 100).

The researcher acknowledges the need to act according to The University of Notre Dame Australia, Policy: Code of conduct (2006) and has examined ways of ensuring the highest integrity in the current research study. Four key steps have been taken to address the area of dual relationship.

1. The researcher is not the unit coordinator or a staff member directly involved in assessing students in the Bachelor of Education elective unit.
2. The research study ran within the Bachelor of Education elective unit, but was completely independent of the unit for assessment purposes.

3. The researcher did not grade any students’ unit assessment tasks (learning log, essay, or examination) or have any input into the credit points awarded for the unit.

4. Pre-service teachers could withdraw from the research study at any time. They could still participate in the Bachelor of Education elective unit for purposes of obtaining credit, as the elective unit and research study were independent of each other.

The researcher undertook the role of “participant as observer” in the research study, whereby she identified herself “straight off as a researcher, but made no pretence of actually being a member of the group she was observing” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 451). Thus the researcher made herself known as an interested observer, who was researching the phenomena of service-learning, but did not participate in any way in the unit of study at the Aboriginal College. Prior to the service-learning experience, the researcher met with each pre-service teacher and explained the purpose and structure of the research study, before conducting the pre-interview. The researcher also clarified her role as “participant as observer”, and emphasised her role of non-participation in the service-learning experience. In doing so, the researcher observed the participants as they worked with the Aboriginal students and viewed the tutorial session that followed each tutoring session. These tutorial sessions were facilitated by other university staff members.
3.2.12 Facilities, resources and data storage

Contact was made with the participants through electronic communication. Interviews were recorded with participants' permission using an audio digital recorder, with transcriptions subsequently recorded on computer software. All expenses including travel, computer usage, and internet access, audio materials, printing and publishing costs were met by the researcher.

The data collected throughout the research study included field notes, interview audio material and transcripts, observation notes and recordings of responses. All items were securely stored, in accordance with the recommended guidelines for the research projects. These will be retained by the researcher for five years, being destroyed after this time. The confidentiality of the participants was protected by maintaining anonymity and coding of data. All data was retained by the researcher and stored for the five years, being used only for this study.

3.3 Conclusion

The research study aimed to explore service-learning as a methodology for developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Through participating in a diagnostic literacy clinic, pre-service teachers worked with students at an Aboriginal educational setting. A qualitative paradigm was used with phenomenology the underpinning philosophy and methodology of the research, with the view that such an approach would provide a rich source of information from a naturalistic setting. Chapter Three has presented the key components of the methodology using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Such a study was viewed as significant, having arisen from a pilot study in 2009 of a similar service-learning experience of pre-service teachers teaching literacy in an Aboriginal
educational setting. In summary, the philosophical assumption underpinning the qualitative research holds to an epistemology congruent with a social constructivist viewpoint, and theoretical perspective of Interpretivism. Such an approach is further reflected through a theoretical perspective of phenomenology. In essence, while using a phenomenological approach through IPA, the study sought to capture the ‘lived experiences’ of the pre-service teachers as they experienced the phenomena of service-learning in an Aboriginal educational context.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research study was to explore service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness with regard to Aboriginal education through involvement in an Aboriginal educational setting. The phenomenological study was designed to provide greater insight into service-learning as a means of addressing the learning needs of pre-service teachers in teaching Aboriginal students. Service-learning was the teaching methodology chosen as it involves experiential learning with structured opportunities for critical thinking and reflection. The pre-service teachers participated in a diagnostic literacy clinic within a service-learning context, working with students at a secondary Aboriginal college. During the diagnostic literacy clinic, pre-service teachers assessed, planned and tutored Aboriginal students for two hours per week for ten weeks. After each tutoring session, a service-learning tutorial was conducted on site for one hour, facilitated by University staff. Data were collected on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education prior, during and at the conclusion of the experience. The results of the data collected during the service-learning experience are presented in this chapter and are designed to address the four research questions that are the focus of the study:

Research Questions

In terms of before, during and after the experience:

1. How does a service-learning experience impact on the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development?
2. How does pre-service teachers’ knowledge of Aboriginal culture develop through exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting?

3. What do pre-service teachers learn about literacy pedagogy as it applies to an Aboriginal context?

4. What do the educational providers perceive as the benefits of the pre-service teachers’ input?

Results are presented from the data collected at the three stages of the phenomenological study: pre-experience conceptions (Section A); during the experience (Section B); and at the conclusion of the service-learning experience (Section C). Interviews with staff at the Aboriginal College are presented in the final section (Section D). Data from each stage of the research is presented in separate sections under these headings.

In utilising an interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researcher designed the initial interview questions to elicit the pre-experience conceptions of the participants relative to the research questions. During the experience, reflective journal entries were used to record the participants’ thoughts, feelings and actions. Post the experience, an interview was conducted with each participant, using questions matched to the initial interview to follow up on the participant’s knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Additional data were provided through the use of field notes, literacy learning logs, participant essays and questionnaires from the College students.
4.2 SECTION A

4.2.1 Pre-experience conceptions of the pre-service teachers

A summary of the responses to the initial interview questions is presented in this section, with supporting statements of each participant’s knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness with regard to Aboriginal education, prior to the service-learning experience. Eight questions were planned in the semi-structured interview and are listed in Appendix E together with the relevant research study question, to show the connection between both elements of the study.

The first question aimed to elicit information as to why the pre-service teachers had chosen to be a part of the unit of study. Secondly, participants were questioned about what they envisaged might be gained from the teaching experience with secondary Aboriginal students and thirdly, the challenges they anticipated. The fourth question sought to explore the participants’ prior experiences and exposure to the Aboriginal culture. Information was also gathered as to the participants’ pedagogical knowledge of teaching Aboriginal students, in question five, with question six, focusing specifically on literacy learning and teaching. The concept of service-learning was explored in question seven, to gain an understanding of the participants’ knowledge and experience with such a methodology. In concluding the interview with question eight, the researcher was keen to gain a sense of the personal thoughts and feelings of the participants prior to the experience and thus another open-ended question inviting any other comments was asked.

4.2.1.1 Responses to the initial individual interview

*Question one: Why have you chosen to participate in this unit of study at the Aboriginal College?*
Participants answered this question with many varied reasons for their decision to be part of the experience. However, all participants expressed an interest in developing their knowledge and skills in teaching Aboriginal students. They were keen to learn about the Aboriginal culture and to experience education in the unique setting of a secondary Aboriginal college:

I think for two main reasons, one because I thought it would be good for me to find out more about and have access to Aboriginals and their culture and the way they learn … to get an understanding of what it is like at the college. (Grace)

… to get a broader knowledge of the cultural diversity and see the difference … I know they’re secondary students but just to see that difference in the Aboriginal community to just normal Australian kids … to see that difference in the cultures … the learning obviously is going to be very different … just to open my eyes a bit more so that I can be more … open to learning different things. (Hannah)

Of the twenty-four participants, thirteen responded that they had never had any experience with Aboriginal students and had chosen to take the opportunity of the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College to have some exposure:

I think the big thing for me is I have never … had experience with Aboriginal children and things like that before … I am very new to it all … I have not had any experience at all or exposure to their culture or anything like that … so I was just curious I guess … so that’s part of it … and then the other part to see how it affects us as a developing teacher. (Clare)

I think it is a good opportunity to work with Aboriginal students and I have never worked with them before or done anything along those lines … so I actually feel quite privileged to be doing it in this way when it’s in their territory … on their campus. (Sarah)

A few participants also expressed concern that Aboriginal people were not always portrayed in a positive way in society. There seemed to be cultural barriers
between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. These participants were keen to gain a greater understanding and new perspective on the teaching of Aboriginal students:

It was also a good opportunity … I hadn’t done any service-learning before, even though I have been in an area, where there is a high number of Aboriginal people, I haven’t actually worked with them … so from the life I’ve lived … it is kind of sheltered … it’s a bit different … and it is not always positive so I kind of wanted to see how they would be viewing us in the way that we relate to them. (Alexander)

Some participants expressed interest in further developing their skills as pre-service teachers, particularly in the area of literacy learning. Others acknowledged how essential skills in literacy were and the effect of low levels of literacy on achievement. They were keen to help the Aboriginal students improve their skills and to learn more as pre-service teachers, about strategies for literacy teaching. The opportunity to teach in a high school, in a one-to-one tutoring context with an Aboriginal student was also stated as a reason for participating in the unit of study:

So you can just be working one to one … get a sense of being a tutor … but that gives you the chance to hone in on the whole skills of (teaching). (Grace)

Also being a literacy unit that influenced my decision … that’s really probably my passion … literacy. (Kate)

Other participants commented how they valued the opportunity to be part of an experience that was different from just lectures and tutorials at the university. The terminology of a “hands-on experience” was used by some participants, who also commented that such an approach suited their learning styles. It was seen as a chance to build self-confidence as a developing teacher while helping the Aboriginal students with their literacy learning. As the unit had operated in the previous year as a pilot study, some participants shared how the experience had been strongly recommended to them by peers:
My best friend did the unit last year and she recommended it … she recommended it very highly … said it was the best unit and something to put on your resume and just the usefulness of it … So it just came so highly recommended. She said it really made an impact and helped her solidify why she wants to be a teacher. (Nelly)

There was a strong sense of personal development and challenge that inspired some of the participants to become involved in the unit. It was acknowledged that the experience would probably take them “out of their comfort zone”; however, each pre-service teacher felt excited and prepared to take on whatever challenge faced them:

I just really wanted to make a difference to an individual student and being able to be that sort of support … and somebody that they can come to as well … .I was really interested in being put outside my comfort zone … because it is definitely nothing that I have been exposed to. (Helen)

When I heard you were doing this and read about it, I thought that will open up my eyes and help me understand more and the personal experience … to see how I will react to that situation … how I will learn. (Gayle)

Another reason for participation in the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College was the interest of some participants in considering a teaching placement in a remote Aboriginal community. It was thought that the exposure to Aboriginal education at the College may provide some insight into the experience of teaching in such a location. Five participants had recently completed a practicum in a remote Aboriginal community and were excited to build on the knowledge and skills they had gained from such an experience:

I think having the experience up in Wyndham definitely made me realise that I wanted to make a difference on the individual indigenous education side of things. (Helen)

I did my 10 week prac. in Broome and that really opened my eyes up about their Aboriginal culture up in Broome. It was a real eye-opener at first and a real shock to the system but then over the 10
weeks I really ... loved all the students and formed real relationships 
... It was really hard for me to leave it in the end. (Vivian)

In conclusion, despite the many and varied reasons, there was an overwhelming desire to help and support the students at the Aboriginal College. All participants considered the experience as an opportunity to develop their interest in Aboriginal education and culture, and to enhance their own knowledge and skills as pre-service teachers. These reasons were further articulated in the second interview question that sought to explore what the participants thought they would gain from the experience. A summary of these responses follow.

*Question two: What do you believe you will gain from the experience?*

In addressing this question, all participants spoke passionately that such an experience would benefit them in many ways and felt a serious commitment to make the most of the opportunity to help the Aboriginal students with their literacy learning. In categorising the responses to the question of what the participants felt they would gain from the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College, four key areas emerged: knowledge of the Aboriginal culture; teaching of literacy; pedagogical knowledge of literacy teaching; and personal growth and development. Each of these areas will be outlined with supporting statements from the participant interviews.

*Knowledge of the Aboriginal culture*

Fourteen of the participants made specific reference to a desire to learn more about the Aboriginal culture. Other participants expressed the view that through the experience of working with the students at the Aboriginal college that he/she hoped to develop more knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal culture:
Understanding their culture and adapting my teaching to suit them … and I think through the time I will gain some confidence as well dealing with them. (Elisabeth)

Definite and possibly how they have the different learning styles … how you can help Aboriginal students … maybe because I have had limited experience with Aboriginal students … as well, just understanding their culture as well … just closing that gap as well. (Casey)

**Teaching of literacy**

Many participants acknowledged that the experience of teaching literacy with the Aboriginal students would be of benefit to them as pre-service teachers. The opportunity to assess, plan and teach was viewed as a way of honing their own teaching skills, as was the chance of developing different strategies related to literacy learning. The service-learning experience was seen as a way of putting theory into practice, in a real life situation:

I think it gives us a really nice opportunity to … do some diagnostic testing and then work each week on a different sort of area but … build on the knowledge that we taught them the week before … I think it will give us a really good progression of teaching literacy especially to a lower ability and I think … personally just becoming more familiar with the Aboriginal culture and especially at the school and getting involved in that sort of community. (Helen)

I am hoping better ways to teach literacy because I really struggled with that because they weren’t interested in Yandeyarra (Remote Community School) … get some skills and knowledge in how to motivate them a bit more. (Samantha)

**Pedagogical knowledge of teaching**

Many responses also demonstrated the pre-service teachers’ desires to develop their knowledge and skills of classroom teaching. The experience was viewed as a means for learning and refining their teaching skills in a real life situation:

Just how differently they learn and how they learnt in the past or not at all … and how their culture also affects the relationship with the
teacher or with other kids or the assignments … so that is what I am trying to gain a bit more of an understanding … so if I have got it in my head I might be able to help them and teach the younger ones as well. (Mary)

I think just the opportunity to work with real life students, I think is fantastic … It helps when we go out on prac. a lot of our theory stuff at uni feels a bit lost on us then when you get out there and you apply it all makes so much more sense … so I hope, in conjunction with our tutors and lecturers, that being in the thick of basically it … we can really get a chance to do that. I think we will gain more than we think we will. (Kate)

*Personal growth and development*

All participants openly shared the personal growth and development they anticipated gaining from the service-learning experience. Some spoke of a boost in confidence that they hoped the teaching experience would give them. Others discussed how they would like to have a positive experience with the Aboriginal students, in contrast to the negative outlook of many in society:

Quite a lot I guess … a lot of learning about myself … and what I am capable of or not capable of … how I approach things and … lots about myself and what I do in a relation to teaching … a better understanding of how to teach better … hopefully because I get more experience. (Grace)

More of a cultural Aboriginal awareness … about their beliefs and values, what they want out of their lives and how, you know, I can help further their dreams and attitudes. (Vivian)

I am guessing … confidence really … confidence and a huge amount of knowledge … and how to handle situations that you are not often put into … situations that I haven’t been put into and dealing with students also really close to my age. (Lea)

I would definitely gain … not that I am a racist person … but it will just be good for me to see the difference in cultures because I can see things one way … so I think this will be a good way for me to see that they are different but similar as well … but just get that balance … (Hannah)

In summary, the gains that the participants envisaged from the service-learning
experience at the Aboriginal College related to cultural awareness, literacy learning, the pedagogy of teaching and personal growth and development. The response of one participant draws each of these concepts together and is evidence of the commitment of the participants to ensuring a positive, meaningful experience for the students at the Aboriginal College:

So much … I think so much … especially if hopefully we are successful in what we are doing and just seeing that in the kids growing and developing, … in knowing that you can do it, it is such a confidence booster too … just the knowledge I guess … it’s really putting your skills in practice … in a classroom. (Gayle)

After discussing the gains that each participant envisaged, the third question that related to the challenges anticipated was asked. A summary of the responses to this question follow.

**Question three: What challenges do you think you might face?**

In addressing the question of challenges, the participants responded in a number of different ways, yet when analysing each response the overwhelming common feature was the emphasis on the importance of establishing a positive relationship with their students. It was viewed as the greatest challenge, especially in such a short time frame (two hours x ten weeks), and of concern for many of the pre-service teachers. The participants not only wanted to have a professional relationship with their Aboriginal student, but also be a ‘friend’ as someone who could help and support them; building such a relationship was seen as a significant challenge:

Also I was thinking about when I work with them because they are quite close to our age. Is that going to be a problem? Like I want to be their friend … but also I have to teach them and try to work out that relationship. (Elisabeth)

Probably building a relationship with the students that we work with … (Elle)
In establishing a relationship with the Aboriginal students, some of the participants expressed concern about the closeness of their age as a university student and that of the secondary students. There was uncertainty as to whether age would be a challenge or of benefit to the experience. Some of the young female participants expressed concern and thought that gender may be a challenge for them too, in relating to the mainly male Aboriginal population at the college:

I don’t want to be offensive … and I think a lot of them are boys. I really want to overcome that barrier of us being the teacher … we’re here for them to learn … and for them to know they can come to us … that we want to help them … not to think of us as someone who is going in and wants to go at the end … that barrier to be broken down I hope. (Gayle)

Another factor that was viewed as a possible challenge to building a positive relationship for some of the pre-service teachers was the diversity of interests anticipated between them and their Aboriginal secondary students.

... but also a lot of their interests are classic secondary school boy interests so they are totally not mine … and so that in itself is quite a challenge … I know nothing about football ... I know nothing about it and yet that’s everything they’re about … so that’s a huge challenge. (Sarah)

Oh gosh a lot … (Lots of laughter!) I don’t know, I don’t even know what’s coming my way … that’s the biggest challenge not knowing … I can’t plan for anything … I don’t know what I am walking into. (Lea)

The cultural difference, particularly for the pre-service teachers with no previous exposure to the Aboriginal culture, was mentioned as a possible challenge for these participants. The uncertainty of how the pre-service teachers would be accepted by the Aboriginal students presented as a challenge for some participants. Others were conscious of the negative view of the Aboriginal culture by many in society, and overcoming such a perspective was seen as a possible challenge:
From a social viewpoint trying to figure where I am going to relate to a secondary aged school boy and an Aboriginal, one that I already know has issues ... socially ... that feels like a huge challenge to me. (Sarah)

Some challenges I think like ... changing their attitude to learning ... obviously they’ve got this attitude to learning like ... “I can’t do it ... I’m dumb” ... Change their attitudes to teaching ... telling them that ... “yeah you can do it ... yes you will be able to learn” ... that’s a big thing ... changing their attitudes towards it. (Betty)

The cultural factor ... cultural things you need to be sensitive towards the students and the way other students interact with you ... sometimes it’s different because of that cultural barrier ... so breaking down that initially and developing the rapport with the students. (Nelly)

Another challenge articulated by a few of the participants related to the teaching of literacy in an appropriate way, to students of very low ability levels. These participants were conscious of addressing the needs of the Aboriginal students, but in a manner that was culturally sensitive and at a suitable academic level. Others were aware of the university training that they were undertaking as either primary or early childhood teachers, and thought that it could be a challenge for them, now working in a secondary context:

I am really nervous about the going in and not knowing their level, how to test for that level and how to go from there. (Gayle)

Being secondary students and that is a challenge in itself because of course we are training to work with primary students. (Grace)

All participants acknowledged that the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College would present its challenges; however, they did not seem to be deterred in any way. Most of the challenges foreseen by the participants, related to the circumstances of working with Aboriginal students, who were of low literacy levels, and developing a meaningful, culturally appropriate program, that would build a positive relationship between them and their student. The researcher was keen to find
out about the previous experiences of the participants in working with Aboriginal people, hence the fourth interview question elicited such information.

**Question four: What experience have you had in working with Aboriginal students?**

As mentioned earlier in response to question one as to the reasons for participating in the unit of study at the Aboriginal College, thirteen of the twenty-four participants answered that they had no previous experience with Aboriginal students for different reasons. In analysing why this was so, most reasons related to the background of the pre-service teachers and where they had lived:

My childhood has been very much brought up in England and things like that so I rarely had the opportunity … so as in working with them I haven’t had that much experience … that’s why I was curious to do this … with the amount of Aboriginals you see around the local area … I don’t think I saw my first one until I came to Perth. (Sarah)

In contrast to the thirteen participants who had no experience with Aboriginal students, the other eleven participants described the range of opportunities that had given them contact with Aboriginal students. One participant shared how she had lived in Carnarvon and attended school with Aboriginal students, many of whom were still her close friends. Another participant umpired football and had the opportunity to mix with Aboriginal people on these occasions. Other participants had taught Aboriginal students during their school practicum, with one pre-service teacher having returned from a placement in Wyndham kindergarten, to enrol in the unit of study at the secondary Aboriginal College. Yet another participant had elected to do her first classroom immersion practicum at the remote community near the Tanami desert. She writes:

My first real experience was when I went to Balgo in 2009 … and I just went for my immersion … but I was there for 2 ½ weeks and I
flew up on a Friday so I had the whole weekend in a house by myself … in this community. My brother dropped me off. He flew me out there and off he went and I arrived … and 47 degrees in the middle of the Tanami desert and I spent the day on the Saturday walking around the community … one of my other passions is photography and I was taking photographs and these kids who I talked to … ended up spending the day with me … playing basketball … making drums … they went picking blackberries … they ranged between seven and probably 12 or 14 years of age. (Jimi)

Thus in addressing question four related to previous experiences with Aboriginal students, more than half of the participants had no contact with Aboriginal people, and the other participants’ exposure varied from life-long contact to specific events in their lives. Despite the varied background experiences of all the participants, each had freely chosen to be part of the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College and to work closely with an Aboriginal student to help improve his/her literacy learning.

As the purpose of the research study was to explore the development of the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, it was deemed essential by the researcher to establish the pre-experience conceptions of the participants in terms of the pedagogy of Aboriginal education, literacy teaching, and service-learning. Thus the next three questions of the initial interview were framed around these concepts: pedagogy of Aboriginal education; literacy teaching; and service-learning. The responses of the participants are summarised under each of these interview questions.

*Question five: What do you believe is important in teaching within an Aboriginal educational context?*

The reactions and responses of the twenty-four participants to such a question were very varied and yet in analysis, common themes emerged as to what was essential
in teaching in an Aboriginal educational context. Cultural awareness, respectful relationships, knowledge of the students and teaching pedagogy were all terms that categorise the key concepts articulated in the individual interviews. Each of these will be expounded.

The majority of the participants spoke about the need to be aware of and sensitive to the cultural context in which they would be working. It was viewed as the most significant factor in teaching within an educational setting, as expressed in the words of the one of the participants:

> Definitely cultural awareness ... just being aware of their background and that they are often very different to us and we need to take that into consideration and not presume that what we are teaching them and how we are teaching them might not be (appropriate) ... so that is one big thing ... (Elena)

Others shared how little they knew of the Aboriginal culture; however, they were open to learning and hoped that the service-learning experience would develop their understanding. Closely linked to the concept of cultural awareness expressed by many, was the term “respect”, with one participant using the phrase, “Be culturally respectful.” Another participant spoke of the need to have respect on two levels:

> I think respect on a couple of levels of respect ... I guess you start off with trying to show any child you are teaching that you respect them and therefore they can learn to respect you, but also the other respect ... respect for their culture. (Grace)

At least another eight participants specifically mentioned that building a respectful relationship with their student was essential to successful teaching within any educational context. The need to trust and value each other was viewed as important while another felt that keeping a positive relationship would be essential to successful learning outcomes.
Many of the participants discussed having access to background knowledge of the student as being significant when teaching within an Aboriginal educational context. Some spoke of the need to have information about the family and home life of the student, past achievements, interests and languages, and even health care. Two participants stressed the importance of connecting to the students’ interests and appreciating the different learning styles when teaching in such a context. Another participant summed up her view of what was important in the statement:

I really think that culture awareness is really important … I think that is really important with all children because Australia is such a multicultural society and I think it is important to really be aware of your own heritage … whether you are born and bred in Australia or you have come out from Africa or Burma and to really appreciate the differences and celebrate the similarities between each other … You can become self-aware and comfortable in your own skin and it’s more likely that you will embrace the differences between others. (Jimi)

Approaches to teaching that were meaningful, age appropriate, hands-on, and engaging, were also mentioned by numerous participants as being important when teaching in an Aboriginal educational context. The need to recognise the individual differences, interests and achievement levels of the students were also mentioned by some participants as key considerations in teaching within such a setting. Although almost all participants could answer the question as to what was important in teaching within an Aboriginal educational context, there were three participants who openly acknowledged that they did not know how to respond to such a question. They felt unsure, had limited experience in Aboriginal education and felt a real lack of knowledge in teaching within such a specialised area. However, all three participants were very eager to learn and viewed the service-learning experience as a way of addressing their own pedagogical needs.
The next question of the initial interview was designed to elicit the pre-conceptions of the pre-service teachers as to the pedagogy of literacy teaching and learning. Thus the following question was asked, and the responses summarised below:

*Question six: What do you believe is important in literacy teaching/learning?*

In analysing the responses of the participants as to their pre-conceptions about effective literacy teaching and learning, all were able to clearly articulate what they believed was essential. Many prefaced their answer by stating how important they saw the role of literacy in education. It was viewed as the backbone of all learning, and vital for active participation in Australian society. If one was illiterate, it was likely that many opportunities would be denied; hence sound teaching practices in literacy education were essential.

Four key concepts summarise the responses of the participants: addressing the deficits in a student’s knowledge, developing a teaching plan, teaching strategies, and curriculum content. The first of these, addressing the deficits in a student’s knowledge, was viewed as the starting point for effective literacy teaching. About half of the participants used terminology associated with “diagnostic assessment”, as the starting point for effective literacy teaching. Some pre-service teachers responded with very specific information about the approach they would take with literacy teaching:

Starting from basics so making sure they can understand so I know what level they are at … maybe start off with those who don’t know letter and sound recognition and then move to CVC (consonant/vowel/consonant) words and then if they are quite good at that, start with sentences and reading. (Georgie)

That’s why starting at the very basics … going through the sounds, going through blending, things like that … before you start reading … I don’t know where they are at … but working out where they are at and … just easy stuff before you progress them on … that’s why
it’s very important to correctly get where they are at … you don’t want to give them something that is way too hard for them … you don’t want to give up because it’s way too easy. (Clare)

The second key concept was that of developing a clear and explicit teaching plan. The components of such a plan were described by some of the participants as incorporating the student’s home language into the lesson, using Indigenous literature, matching interests and needs, and making the learning purposeful and engaging. One participant described her view of what was important in her approach to literacy teaching as:

Making sure it is motivating … definitely engaging to them … It matches their interests … using books that really matches their interests and their developmental level … making it authentic because in terms of your teaching them the literacies that they need so that they can progress and see success. (Grace)

Many of the responses of the pre-service teachers were linked to key teaching strategies that they deemed important in literacy education, and represented the third key concept. One participant made reference to the use of specific reading strategies such as decoding, chunking and chaining. Another mentioned the importance of guided reading and writing, and the use of a wide range of literature relevant to the students’ lives. One pre-service teacher commented on the value of developing fluency in reading, and giving practice, while another stressed the importance of strategies that were fun and engaging. All participants were able to articulate teaching strategies they believed were important in literacy education.

The fourth key concept, related to the curriculum content. Several participants commented on the need for students to have basic literacy concepts to be successful in
literacy tasks. Examples such as letter sound recognition, and knowledge of phonics were highlighted by some in their journals:

Solid concepts, absolutely ground level solid concepts and not moving on until the student has got that concept 100% ‘down pat’. (Nelly)

It was also noted by several participants that the curriculum content needed to be developmentally appropriate, motivating and engaging, use a wide range of media, and be purposeful and meaningful. A suggestion was made by one participant that the completion of a mining application could be a relevant literacy learning experience, that she would consider using in her literacy program. Another pre-service teacher answered that she believed that patience was an essential component of literacy teaching:

Patience … because it’s going to take a long time so keep persevering and supporting them … and solid learning. (Sarah)

It was clear from the responses of the participants to the question of what was important in literacy teaching, that all could readily articulate their beliefs about literacy pedagogy. The researcher followed with the next question that related to the concept of service-learning, and sought to elicit the knowledge of the participants prior to the service-learning experience at the Aboriginal secondary college.

*Question seven: What do you understand by the term ‘service-learning’?*

In defining the term ‘service-learning’, there was a significant difference between the participants who had some understanding of the concept, and those who knew nothing of it. Of the twenty-four participants, seven stated that they did not have any understanding of the terminology of service-learning; however they were keen to learn more. The other seventeen participants expressed the view that service-learning
related to helping in the community, whilst learning about oneself. It was doing a
service to others which in turn was of benefit to both, those providing and receiving the
service. One participant spoke of the reciprocal nature of service-learning, with another
clearly defining such a concept related to the school experience:

... how it is a reciprocal relationship between you, the students, their
teachers ... and I might be teaching these kids something but they are
also teaching me something in turn ... so it is reciprocal ... and like
being a part of the community ... not just expecting something in
return ... you will get that but you are not expecting it. (Elena).

I guess that we are each serving each other so we are serving the
students at the college by giving them the learning hopefully that
they require to bring them on in their literacy, and they’re serving us
by allowing us to learn about them and their culture ... and allowing
us a chance to learn more about our ability to teach. (Grace)

Some participants described service-learning as being consistent with active-
learning, having a ‘hands-on’ approach and indeed, related the concept to a university
experience:

Active learning ... I prefer to call it active learning because it’s
taking all that theory that you get through uni, through textbooks,
through readings into a practical context and just being able to use
what you know as well as experimenting with things that you want
to see ... whether it’s what works or not ... and being able to feel
confident in yourself before you go out independently. (Nelly)

In summary, the definition of service-learning from those pre-service teachers
familiar with the terminology was consistent with the key concepts of the term, relating
to an experience that has mutual benefit for parties: the server and those receiving the
service. Participants who had no understanding of the terminology did not attempt to
address the question, simply stating they knew nothing of it.
In concluding the initial interview schedule, the researcher provided an open-ended question that enabled the participants to seek further information about the service-learning experience they were preparing to undertake. It also provided an opportunity for the participants to express their thoughts and feelings at the pre-conception phase of the research study.

*Question eight: Is there anything else that you might like to add before you begin the unit of study at the Aboriginal College?*

In the comments from each of the twenty-four participants to the final question, all responded with a strong emotional expression. There was a continuum of responses from being excited, happy, curious and eager to a sense of nervousness, apprehension, anxiety and feeling completely overwhelmed by what was to come. Some participants expressed mixed emotions that moved across the continuum of feelings:

I am curious ... so I am curious and excited to see what the next 10 weeks will bring ... nervous too ... It is nerve racking not having experienced anything like this before ... and also not really anxious but ... are relying on us so much ... It’s a lot of things ... nerves, happiness, excitement ... something different ... that’s what we were saying ... It’s getting us out of the uni ... getting us into the school environment. (Casey)

Really looking forward to it ... just going in with an open mind ... I think I will be happy once the first session is over and we have met our student and try and build the relationship. (Elle)

Other participants shared how they valued the opportunity that the service-learning unit of study would give them, in being able to connect to a classroom and learn in such a practical way. There was an acknowledgement by many that the experience was likely to challenge them in areas unknown; however, such challenges were viewed in a positive manner:
I think these units are just great because we are in the classroom … we are getting experience and we are pushing ourselves so far out of our comfort zone which is what you need … you need that challenge. (Gayle)

I am looking forward to it and its challenges … I am sure it will present many … but that’s part of it and I think as I said … just the experience that we will gain from implementing literacy and particularly in that type of context. It will be something that perhaps I might not get to experience, maybe ever, not for a long time … I am looking forward to it. (Kate)

One participant shared how she was pleased that the structure of the service-learning experience enabled her to work with a colleague in planning and delivery of the literacy lessons. In being able to work collaboratively, the participant was sure she would gain confidence in addressing the demands of the unit of study:

I am glad it is working with another student from uni as well … so it’s two and two … which I believe it will be better … because [I have] more confidence around friends … we’re around our friends … we work together so it’s all collaborative … which I really enjoy working in … I am really looking forward to this unit. It should be really fun. (Vivian)

In conclusion, despite the mixed emotions of a significant number of the participants, there was a strong sense of commitment and resolve to begin the unit of service-learning with a passion to make the best of the experience and to make it worthwhile for the students of the Aboriginal college. All participants were keen to begin and prepared to face the challenges ahead. The researcher gained a clear sense of the importance and value of the unit of study that was being undertaken at the Aboriginal College to improve the literacy learning of the students, from the participant responses. Each participant showed an awareness of the role and responsibility they had in participating in the service-learning experience, and were committed to preparing and teaching weekly lessons whilst maintaining a reflective journal during the study.
As stated in Larkin, Eatough and Osborn (2011) the aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis is to understand “what it is like to be experiencing this, for this particular person, in this context” (p. 330). The emphasis was thus on capturing the service-learning phenomena from the participant’s perspective using data collected throughout the experience, in different formats. The research study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education used a number of different documents as data, to inform the research study during the ten weeks of implementation of the phenomenon. These included field notes and journal from the researcher, and journal reflections and weekly literacy lesson plans in a learning log, compiled by the participants. The researcher’s own journal enabled her to note key points to ‘bracket’ as these understandings or assumptions arose from the pre-service teachers’ responses. For example, the limited knowledge of ‘service-learning’ by many alerted the researcher to the need to ‘hold back’ and not address this gap in knowledge thus influencing the pre-service teachers. She noted too, the limited exposure to Aboriginal people and the mixed emotions expressed by some of the participants in working with them, especially the boys. Although challenging to ‘put aside’ one’s own assumptions that all will be well, the researcher valued the journaling as a key strategy to assist in ‘bracketing’.

Section B of the results provides an overview of the field notes, journal reflections, and learning logs, as data to document the journey of the participants during the service-learning experience.

4.3 SECTION B

4.3.1 Conceptions during the experience of the pre-service teachers

As the aim of the research was to capture the “lived experience” of the participants throughout the ten week service-learning phenomena, the results are
summarised and presented week by week. The participants’ weekly journal reflections were subjected to “systematic processes of reflection, identification, description, clarification, interpretation, and conceptualisation” as recommended by Larkin, et al. (2011, p. 330). These reflective journals served to inform all the research questions, with specific relevance to the first research question about the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development throughout the experience.

The second research question concerning the knowledge and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education was informed by the reflective journals, learning logs and field notes documented throughout the service-learning experience. Learning logs compiled by the participants, recorded the lessons taken each week and were used to inform the third research question related to the literacy pedagogy of the pre-service teachers. The overall research focus on service-learning drew on data from all documentation across the phenomenological experience.

In structuring the study, the researcher was conscious of the volume of data that would be generated from twenty-four participants, over ten weeks with weekly reflective journals, learning logs and field notes. As such a proforma for the weekly reflections was created and discussed with each participant, during the initial interview of the research study. The research questions were used to frame the proforma and thus make comparison and analysis systematic and thorough. (Appendix H: Weekly Journal Reflection Framework). The proforma was designed to elicit reflections in the key areas of personal and professional development, literacy pedagogy, cultural awareness, Aboriginal education, and service-learning. Participants were also encouraged to share their personal feelings and emotions in their weekly reflections. About half of the
participants chose to follow the proforma, with others freely writing their reflections on the experience. As such, the results of participants’ conceptions throughout the phenomenon are presented using the key areas and headings of:

- Personal and professional development
- Literacy pedagogy
- Cultural awareness
- Aboriginal education
- Service-learning

### 4.3.2 Week One: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

*Personal and professional development*

Many of the reflections in week one were centred around the mixed emotions of the participants as they arrived at the secondary school for the first time and began the unit of study with their allocated Aboriginal student. Strong emotions were shared by all participants, from excitement, anticipation, and apprehension to those of feeling daunted, very nervous and scared. Some expressed doubt about their capacity as a pre-service teacher to fulfil the role of educating the secondary Aboriginal students, and questioned their decision to participate in the experience. The reflections of one of the participants captured the emotions of many:

Prior to attending the College I had a varied range of emotions. I was very nervous about meeting the students and in particular my individual, as well as the challenges I would face each week as an individual/learning teacher. I was also very excited about being involved in the program and being able to help someone else in society. By doing this program I had a great feeling inside and I really felt that I was doing something useful with my time. It seemed like an invaluable experience to be a part of and I felt it will help me grow as well as offering an opportunity for the student to receive some extra help. As I arrived at the college I was scared and overwhelmed driving down the driveway. The moment where we were matched to our partner was also daunting but I believed that Ken’s [Literacy Coordinator] idea of the jigsaw puzzle worked really well and was a great idea. (Casey)
After each of the participants was with his/her Aboriginal student, groups of four were formed: two Aboriginal students with two pre-service teachers. These groups then toured the school and used the lesson time to become acquainted. The researcher used this as a valuable opportunity to observe the interactions between the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students. There was a sense of nervousness and apprehension by both; however, as time went on the atmosphere was more relaxed and friendly. One participant reflected:

It blew me away how polite and well mannered ... were the boys I met today. It was great to see them shake hands and introducing themselves with confidence. (Betty)

Another participant commented on how valuable it was to be working with a partner, as it provided a sense of support and confidence, especially in the planning and development of lessons. It also encouraged participation by the Aboriginal students, as many were paired with friends and thus could relax a little together.

**Literacy Pedagogy**

As the session continued, the pre-service teachers implemented the activities and strategies planned to engage the Aboriginal students and to begin to assess their levels of literacy achievement that would inform future lessons. It was through these experiences that many of the participants reflected on their own personal and professional learning. Some expressed delight at how successful their lessons had been, while others had found it difficult to connect with their student:

I went into the school today both excited and nervous. My partner and I had planned multiple “get to know you” activities which we thought were very exciting and fun. The boys however, thought otherwise! We had to quickly change our plans to involve them in an activity that was interesting for them. It was a great learning curve to be faced with first off, showing us that plans won’t always go the
way we intend, and that we really need to communicate with the boys on topics and activities that will interest them. During my prac placements I have never had a lesson flunk so quickly, so it was a great learning experience on how to cater for such a drastic change in plans. (Gayle)

In analysing the learning logs compiled by the pre-service teachers, the first lessons planned by participants had a focus on learning opportunities that would elicit key background knowledge of the Aboriginal student. Brainstorming, mind mapping, and the sharing of stories were key strategies planned and implemented in the first teaching sessions. Many participants used this experience to gather information about the interests and needs of their students. Some confronting information arose from the personal stories of a few Aboriginal students. A number of the pre-service teachers were distressed at the lack of literacy skills of the Aboriginal students and questioned their capacity to address these needs, especially when the students were teenagers. Despite these factors, all participants made comment on how respectful, well-mannered and willing to learn the Aboriginal students were. A comment made by one of the participants reflected such issues:

I also felt very sad after today’s visit because I heard my student read and saw her writing skills, I saw how far behind my student was and realised how much assistance she needs to catch up. Although my student is so far behind, her attitude towards learning is so positive, which I think makes a huge difference when working with her. (Elisabeth)

Of concern for some participants was their capacity to engage and connect with the secondary Aboriginal students. Twelve of the participants were training as early childhood teachers, with the other twelve undertaking a degree in primary education. Although the different levels of teacher training were perceived as a challenge, it did not appear to be significant once the service-learning experience had began:
For my first visit to the school, I was extremely nervous about meeting the student that I was going to be working with. I was nervous about how I was going to effectively build a relationship with a teenage student because I come from an Early Childhood background. However, I was able to make many connections with my student, such as where she comes from, where she and I have spent time living and that I knew some of her distant family. From this I am sure we will get along well together and be able to have a good teacher-student relationship. (Elisabeth)

*Cultural Awareness*

A number of the pre-service teachers reflected on how they were challenged by assumptions that they had made about Aboriginal people and their culture. The experience of meeting and working with Aboriginal students was changing their perceptions:

When I met Matt, I was pleasantly surprised to find that he displayed genuinely excellent manners. My surprise suggested that, whilst I believed I had not adopted society’s stereotypical view of Aboriginals being less than well behaved, I was in fact harbouring some preconceived ideas. I was humbled to see just how wrong I was. In particular, I became aware of the marked difference between my apprehensive approaches to engaging with the Aboriginal school community compared to their very open acceptance of us engaging with them in their community. (Grace)

Something I have come to a realisation of is that maybe because of society or my experience with Aboriginals in the community; I have attached a negative stigma to their race. I was glad that after my first session I have a whole new positive outlook. After the first day/session, I found myself wanting to share with my friends and family all about the college and Lee [my student]. I felt proud to talk about him and his aspirations and I am so excited to learn more about his life. I am also so excited to help him with his literacy, and hope to see some progress and make some goals to be achieved in our time together. I was taken out of my comfort zone being a part of this unit but I am so proud of myself for giving it a go and can’t wait to see what’s to come. (Casey)

Some participants expressed surprise at the cultural practices that a few of the Aboriginal students shared that were important to them. A number of the Aboriginal
students were from remote communities and spoke two or three traditional languages. They also engaged in cultural practices significantly different to those of the pre-service teachers. As reflected by one participant:

The culture of my student is extremely different to my culture. He lives in a hostel with other students. He goes home to the Kimberleys for the holidays to spend time with his family. He goes hunting in the bush for kangaroos, turkeys and emus. He speaks his native language as well as English, which he speaks quite fluently. My student has already opened my eyes and made me aware of how different his culture is to mine! (Hannah)

Similar reflections were made by another participant who reinforced the cultural practices that were still important to her Aboriginal student. She was excited to use the opportunity of working with her student as a means of building her own cultural awareness. Her thoughts were expressed in the words from her journal:

Although I am aware that there are many cultural differences between us I was surprised at the activities he still does with his family. Len [my student] was sharing that he went hunting with his family and loved to go to rodeos. I felt naive to think that children their age didn’t do that anymore. But I was so interested with these facts and can’t wait to learn more about where he hunts and what he hunts, to learn more about their culture. Len also shared that he speaks two aboriginal languages and I am intrigued to learn parts of their language and hear him speak in these languages. I found that after speaking with him, in some ways we are not that different. (Casey)

Aboriginal Education

The reality of challenges faced by teachers in a school setting were immediate for one of the participants when her Aboriginal student was absent on the first day of the unit of study. She was positive in her reflection as to how this experience would support her personal development stating:

When it came time to meet the students, I was very disappointed to find the student I was partnered with was not at school. At first I thought disappointed, as the activity I had organised would not be
used and I had put a lot of time and effort into planning it. However, after reflecting on this I think it will help me with my resilience and flexibility, as I need to be prepared if my student does not come to school. I also know now that the short amount of teaching time I have with my student is incredibly precious so my activities need to be exceptionally well planned. I feel this is an excellent opportunity for me to refine my teaching skills and use some new strategies and activities. (Nelly)

Service-learning

Despite the initial feelings of many of the participants, most of the reflections of the pre-service teachers conclude with positive comments about the service-learning opportunity and anticipation of a worthwhile and valuable learning experience:

By the end of the session I was feeling very overwhelmed and nervous about planning lessons for the next session. However, after discussing with the unit tutors our plans for the next sessions, I felt more at ease and ready for the next session. I am starting to feel more and more excited about the unit and working with the boys! (Gayle)

Of significance to the structure of the service-learning experience, was the opportunity for all participants to come together at the conclusion of the tutoring time, with the staff from the university. As reflected in the comments above, such a session enabled clarification of learning strategies and activities, and a debriefing session for all participants. The session was held on site adjacent to the teaching areas for the tutoring program, and enabled open and honest reflection of the service-learning experience. Participants also used the time to begin planning and preparation for the following week’s teaching session.
4.3.3 Week Two: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

To begin the second week of the service-learning experience, the pre-service teachers gathered in the hall at the Aboriginal college and waited for instructions as to how they might begin the tutoring program. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation as the pre-service teachers organised their resources and teaching materials. Within a short time, the Literacy Coordinator at the Aboriginal college instructed the pre-service teachers to gather their nominated Aboriginal students from the various form classes. As soon as the students were located, the groups organised themselves into appropriate learning spaces and began the second tutoring session. The researcher recorded in the field notes that all groups seemed focused and that conversations appeared to flow relatively easily. Data from the second week of the pre-service teachers’ learning logs, reflective journals and field notes were analysed under the headings as discussed in Section B, the first of these relating to personal and professional development.

Personal and professional development

In considering the personal impact of the experience on the pre-service teachers, most of the comments in the journal entries for Week Two were statements conveying mixed emotions by the participants as they described feelings of being overwhelmed, nervous and anxious, yet still showing enjoyment. Many of the pre-service teachers’ reflections contained positive affirmations that the experience in the second week of tutoring had been a very positive one. The Aboriginal students appeared to be engaged and motivated to participate in the lessons. The pre-service teachers seemed very conscious of the need to strengthen the relationship with their Aboriginal student and implemented strategies to learn more about the student’s interests, likes and dislikes and
family connections. Some participants commented that their own personal traits were being strengthened; in particular, their development of patience and flexibility. The researcher noted the laughter, joking and sense of enjoyment that was evident as the second session progressed.

In terms of professional development, a number of pre-service teachers shared how they were growing in confidence in their own teaching ability as the tutoring session continued. One participant had experienced a recent school practicum that made her question her own teaching ability. The service-learning experience was helping rebuild her confidence and providing valuable teaching opportunities. All pre-service teachers reflected on the amount of planning needed for the tutoring lessons and how time consuming it could be. Many were challenged in finding age-appropriate resources that would engage and maintain the Aboriginal students’ interest. The use of the computer was mentioned by one pre-service teacher as being effective in helping the Aboriginal students stay focused during the lesson.

Another common reflection in the learning logs of the pre-service teachers related to the need to be well-planned and organised for the tutoring session. This was a challenge for some as they did not have a great deal of information about their student and were uncertain about what could be achieved in one session. However, this experience was helping the pre-service teachers refine and strengthen their planning strategies:

I learnt you can never be too prepared. We had planned for what we thought would be enough, and turns out it was not enough at all. So this has motivated me to be a lot more prepared in the future. (Nelly)
In researching these learning tasks, the pre-service teachers shared how they were refining and developing as teachers. They reflected on the challenges that they were encountering to meet the needs of their students:

I’m finding that I am have to access a variety of different information to make my teaching effective which I am finding is strengthening my teaching. I was a bit worried about the age-appropriateness of my activities, but our students loved the way we set it up. It was fine. They loved the “top secret mission” task. (Karen)

The last thing that I want to do, is create a program that is dull and one that stops him being motivated. This is the area that I need to work on myself and develop my skills in. All in all this week was still a positive experience; however, the job of teaching a teenage boy how to spell became a little challenging. (Lea)

Despite the challenges and perceived difficulties, all the pre-service teacher participants were confident that the experiences being faced would be beneficial to their development as teachers. Even after two weeks, there was a very positive atmosphere between the group and the statement following reflected the views of many:

In this unit I want to develop as a teacher. I have found already in my second week I am developing skills … I really want to make a massive difference in this literacy. He is so willing to work which makes me really happy … Overall I am really happy with how this unit is going so far and I feel that I have grown personally and developed a bit as a teacher. (Georgie)

The second area for consideration in the data analysis relates to the concept of the pre-service teachers’ literacy pedagogy. The following section details the responses of the participants’ as the experience influenced their understanding and knowledge of the acquisition of literacy.
Literacy Pedagogy

Many participants were quick to realise the limitations of the Aboriginal students in terms of their literacy development. Through observations, discussions and some specific assessment tasks, the participants gained a more in-depth knowledge of the students’ literacy learning needs. However, the depth of the task ahead in literacy tuition was made easier for some of the participants by the positive attitudes that many of the Aboriginal students displayed in the tutoring session. As one participant writes:

Although my student is so far behind, her attitude towards learning is so positive. (Elena)

A number of the pre-service teachers also reflected on how readily the Aboriginal students engaged orally, yet when asked to complete written or reading tasks they were very hesitant. Much encouragement and coercing was needed by the pre-service teachers to get any written work completed by the Aboriginal students. The challenge for many of the participants was to find relevant and meaningful strategies to help maintain engagement and interest in the literacy sessions. These thoughts are evidenced in the learning log of one of the pre-service teachers:

I found my student to engage very well verbally; however, he really struggled with any written work and would quickly lose interest in the task at hand. I feel as though I need to push myself further and find techniques that will engage him in writing whilst still ensuring he gets practice at writing and is strengthening the skills he already has and is developing. (Gayle)

Finding and using age-appropriate teaching materials was also a challenge for many of the pre-service teachers. They were very conscious that the Aboriginal students being tutored were teenagers and did not want to offend, discourage or isolate these students because of the resources presented to them. The structure of the tutorial session helped in some way to minimise the problem of using age-appropriate materials. It was
suggested that time in the tutorial sessions should be devoted to the development of a “My Story” project, thus giving the freedom to both the Aboriginal student and their pre-service teacher tutor the opportunity to explore topics of interest and to present such information in formats of their choosing. A wide variety of learning tasks were considered. It was planned that projects would be displayed at the conclusion of the tutoring program to the school community through a “Gallery Walk”. An example of such a project was shared in the journal reflection:

We thought about creating a magazine about Leif [our student] for the “Gallery Walk”. We will begin this in Week 3. The magazine will contain information all about Leif and his hopes and goals in life. I have chosen this activity because I believe it will help him in his future endeavours:

- Week 3: Mining application
- Week 4: Football (Geelong) profile
- Week 5: Living in Looma
- Week 6: Fishing and hunting
- Week 7: Sports profile on the ‘board game’. (Georgia)

As mentioned above, the project that proved to be successful and engaging for one of the Aboriginal students was the researching and completion of an application to work in the mining industry. Yet another student was keen to improve her essay writing skills, to enable a successful entry into a university course and it became the focus of the project. However, the development of the “My Story” project also created a pressure for some pre-service teachers due to the time constraints and accountability of displaying a product at the “Gallery Walk”.

An important component of the service-learning experience for seven of the twenty four pre-service teachers was the tuition they were asked to provide through a direct instructional literacy program entitled “MULTI-LIT” (Making up Lost Time in Literacy). Such a program had been adopted by the Aboriginal College to help support
those students with very low literacy levels. The pre-service teachers who were paired with these students through the tutoring program had to take a twenty minute MULTI-LIT session each week. The learning logs of these participants made reference to the direct instructional program and how it impacted on their student. In Week Two of the sessions, most of the comments in the learning logs related to getting to know the program structure and the responses of the Aboriginal students. As stated by one participant:

So they (the school staff) had not been able to get him to do MULTI-LIT last week, so it just goes well for the tutoring program to say that ... they are really enthusiastic about it and he obviously really wanted to do it. I didn’t have to ask him twice. He was very happy to come in and June [Teacher Assistant] had gone through the MULTI-LIT with us last week and I sort of thought ... I am not a 100% sure what they want us to do, but I sat down and I was sort of fluffing about a bit and he just opened it (the book) and just started and he said, Miss we are here! ... And he kept calling me Miss, Miss. So I took my lead from him. (Sarah)

The pre-service teachers also reflected on their knowledge of literacy pedagogy through the strategies and resources that they explored to help them develop lessons that would be engaging and relevant to the Aboriginal students. One participant reflected that she was using an approach she had used previously to help her manage the tutorial sessions:

I guess my only apprehension is ‘just knowing’ that we can produce the project within the time frame that we have. But by using the Plan, Do, Review checklist that I am using, I think that if stepped out correctly, I should and would be able to get over this and on with this project. (Karen)

The strategy of goal setting was also being used by a number of the pre-service teachers within the tutoring session to help the Aboriginal students engage and commit to the learning tasks in hand. Some participants expressed surprise and delight at how
focused the students were and that their goals and aspirations were no different to their own. The journal entry of one pre-service teacher reflected these feelings:

It was also great how my student shared with me how he wanted to go to another school, as he feels it will give him more opportunities, which showed me how serious and important he takes school. (Betty)

The third area of data analysis from the Week Two learning logs, field notes and reflective journals related to the cultural awareness of the pre-service teachers as they participated in the service-learning experience.

*Cultural Awareness*

A number of the participants made specific reference to their understanding of the Aboriginal culture in their learning logs. As one pre-service teacher stated:

My student used a native word for white bird today ‘bundar’. (I will need to update myself on that as I am not sure that is the word). We are going to start to look at his story about what life is like for him back home in Kununurra and we hope to use his native language through the book that we will create. I find it fascinating how different regions have different languages and since I don’t know any Aboriginal words really, this is going to be a great learning experience for me and for him since he will feel empowered to teach it to me. (Karen)

One pre-service teacher recorded the personal impact that working with an Aboriginal student was having on her and another, on the challenges that the home language was presenting:

I’m finding myself to be more aware of the Aboriginal culture this week and I am more understanding towards my student. (Hannah)

We are noticing how shy these boys are and how much they talk in their native language to each other. We are unsure on whether we should ask them to stop or not or maybe reward them if they don’t do it too often. (Julie)
In contrast to these statements by Hannah and Julie, other participants found that their Aboriginal students did not know another Aboriginal language nor did they relate specifically to any cultural aspects. The extent of reflections recorded by the participants that related to cultural concepts was determined in many ways by the background of the Aboriginal student that they worked with. As such, some participants made no reference to these concepts in their Week Two learning logs and journals.

The fourth area of interest to the research study was the impact of the phenomenon on the pre-service teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal education. Some of the participants made specific reference in their learning logs and journals, while others reflected in a general way about what was important in Aboriginal education. A summary of the Week Two responses are presented.

*Aboriginal Education*

The responses of the participants were quite varied in their journals and learning logs as to the concepts that were recorded under the heading of Aboriginal education. One pre-service teacher expressed her point of view that working with Aboriginal students was like working in any classroom. It was interesting to note that she had recently completed a ten week school practicum at a remote Aboriginal school in the Pilbara. Her journal reflection states:

> It’s quite similar to any other classroom, you just need to identify their interests and develop ideas around this. Just like any other students, they are going to lose interest if they aren’t engaged in the activity. (Samantha)

Many of the participants made comment that it was important to connect with the Aboriginal students on topics of interest to them and found that learning about their
culture, community and home life was engaging. Sporting interests, particularly football
and basketball, also provided a meaningful and relevant context for learning. The
comments from the journal reflections are evidence of such reflections:

I have noticed how much the history of some famous Aboriginals really interests the students, and I feel as though I could use this to benefit the boys. (Julie)

The boys love the idea of the final project which was a huge relief to know. They got stuck into creating a dream team and you could see they enjoyed going through the newspaper and football cards. When we said to them about linking them to literacy they were shocked as to how anything other than a story was a “text”. I found this interesting and exciting, seeing both boys become so focused on the task because it was something new, yet a topic that they loved. (Clare)

Another significant theme that emerged from the Week Two data analysis was the sense of support, friendship and community that was felt by the pre-service teachers as they entered and worked in the Aboriginal College:

It was again a great session and we still tried to make it informal and learn more about them. It was also great when we all had a few laughs together and jokes. Another beautiful moment was at the end of the session, we saw Leon [our year10 student] walk off and put his arm over Len [our year 8 student] for a good 20 seconds as they walked off. It was gorgeous and we have noticed that prior to them being grouped they were not friends but Leon is encouraging his younger peer, and caring for him throughout our sessions. Great to see! (Elisabeth)

I am actually finding it a great experience to see that an Aboriginal community of students is so empowered by one another. (Cade)

Other pre-service teachers found it difficult to work with the Aboriginal students, at this early stage of the program, because they were so shy and reluctant to communicate. Some found that the Aboriginal students’ use of their home-language during the tutorial sessions was also difficult to manage. Some shared how the
information given about the Aboriginal student they were to tutor was not always accurate, and could be misleading. As stated by one pre-service teacher:

After today I am feeling more anxious than last week only because I am freaking out about what work to do with my student. He is a lot smarter than I had thought. I’m hoping the anxiety will settle once I find some work to do with him. (Hannah)

Many of the pre-service teachers had mixed feelings about their ability to address the needs of Aboriginal students, given the literacy levels, age and cultural aspects of teaching in a secondary context. These responses were also reflected in the journal entries and learning logs in reference to the final area of the Week Two reflections on the service-learning experiences.

Service-learning

The impact of the service-learning experience, even in such a short time-frame was articulated by one pre-service teacher and the enthusiasm of another pre-service teacher was also reflected in her journal entry:

I have established a good relationship with my student and we have been able to work together successfully. Something that I have learnt for myself is how much I love working with Aboriginal students; there is something special in the way my student communicates and her approach to learning. (Elizabeth)

Some people have a negative attitude towards Aboriginal people and I have seen how ignorant those people are. I hope that with this experience I can educate people to have a better attitude towards Aboriginal education. Having this chance to participate in this program has been one of the best units I have done at Notre Dame University. (Elena)

Despite the majority of pre-service teachers stating that the service-learning experience was a positive one, there were one or two others who were finding that this
was not so. One pre-service teacher was very descriptive in how she was feeling about the situation, and acknowledged that it was in stark contrast to her peers:

I am going to say that I finished this second week feeling like I am a wet rag ... I mean I was absolutely done in ... I was thinking, thank the Lord that’s over ... It was so exhausting. (Grace)

In following this scenario, the pre-service teacher concerned (Grace) soon discovered that her Aboriginal student (Matt) had a learning disability and needed to have additional support and a modified learning program. (Pseudonyms have been used for all names within the study). A valuable part of the service-learning research study was the journey that unfolded for the both the pre-service teacher Grace, and her student Matt, in exploring ways of addressing his learning needs in a meaningful and engaging way. As such, Grace’s experience will be shared each week throughout the result section, entitled “A case study of Grace and her student, Matt”. A case study was included as part of the research study, as it provided extensive data collection and analysis of a single example and individual. As was the routine of the service-learning unit of study, the pre-service teachers gathered together to conclude the Week Two session with a de-briefing tutorial facilitated by university staff. Discussion during the tutorial focused on the positives and negatives of the experience that day. Participants were encouraged to record these reflections in their journals.

4.3.4 Week Three: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

Field notes and journal reflections provided a very clear picture of the service-learning experience for Week Three of the phenomenological research. As all the organisational structures of the program were in place, the pre-service teachers promptly
focused on the planned lessons with the Aboriginal students. There was a very strong sense of engagement and work production. As stated in the field notes:

I really felt the school was abuzz with activities and so much focused learning was happening. The university staff shared their impressions with the expression that referred to the focused, professional and on task behaviour by all concerned. (Researcher)

These field notes supported the ‘bracketing’ of assumptions by the researcher and were also recorded in the research journal, based on staff observations and commentary on Week One and Two of the experience.

The importance of building a relationship with the Aboriginal student was at the forefront of the minds of many of the pre-service teachers, as they began the Week Three lesson, yet they were very conscious of the time limit that the program placed on them. One pre-service teacher expressed her feelings quite strongly in her journal reflection:

I am still feeling the same amount of angst when I am driving to the College each morning. I am really concerned about the relationship I have with Amy [my student] as I am struggling to keep her on task. I feel that I would like a minimum of 6 months working with her, so I don’t feel like I need to put pressure on her to work while I am still developing a trusting relationship with her. (Jimi)

Others chose to begin the lessons using a variety of approaches some of which involved the playing of educational games such as Scrabble, Chatterbox, Scattergories and computer games. These activities were planned to build relationships and created a more relaxed learning environment. Further analysis of the Week Three experiences are discussed using the themes described in Section B, the first of these relating to personal and professional development.
Personal and professional development

It was evident from the pre-service teachers’ reflective journals that they were setting very high expectations of themselves and their students in the lessons planned. There was a growing confidence in the pre-service teachers in planning and teaching as their role in the service-learning experience became clearer. However, as they learned more about the needs of the Aboriginal student being tutored, the reality of the task ahead impacted significantly. As documented by one pre-service teacher:

I couldn’t believe my eyes seeing two teenage boys sitting in front of me struggling and slowly reading their way through their paragraph-no expression, no punctuation was shown and it hit me that these students (Indigenous or not) have every right to be taught and shown the correct way to read. (Clare)

A growing attachment of the pre-service teachers with their students was also evident in the personal stories shared in the reflective journals. One pre-service teacher described how she was learning a great deal about her Aboriginal student and his family and the more she interacted with him, the stronger was the desire to support and help him. She wrote:

Greg[my student] is pleasant, well-mannered, easy to talk to and to get along with and the more times we meet the more I want to help even more than 1 ½ hours per week for 9 weeks ... and the more attached I become. My feelings about Greg are all positive and we continue to build a rapport with each other. (Kate)

As the Aboriginal students shared their personal stories, a number of the pre-service teachers made comment in their journals about the challenges these students faced. The reality of such a challenge became evident to one pre-service teacher when her student was absent for the tutorial session. He was facing a personal trauma with a family member being imprisoned, whilst he was away at boarding school. She decided to write a letter to this student to support and encourage him during such a difficult
time. The depth of the personal impact of the experience is reflected in the journal of the pre-service teacher:

Unfortunately Steven [my student] was not available today due to a problem he had with other students. Ken [Literacy Coordinator] advised me that Steven was experiencing anger management issues and had problems in his home life with his mother facing problems with the law. It seems that Steven had problems on the home front, at his hostel with friends and with those friends being at school, he did not want to come to school either. On all fronts, Steven was experiencing a difficult time. I was advised by Ken that I was the only part of his life that was not problematic. Ken had hoped that Steven would come to his class and so did I. We both agreed that it may be the only time for Steven to escape the problems he was having. Steven did not come. I wrote Steven a letter and set some homework for him to do. I put the letter and the homework in a box and asked that he bring the box back to me next week with his homework and some other things to help with our project. I told him we had a lot to do and that we all had rough days and we need to persevere. (Sarah)

As a result of developing a closer connection with their students, some of the pre-service teachers faced the dilemma of maintaining a professional role as a tutor whilst keen to build a personal relationships, without becoming too much of a ‘friend’. Some pre-service teachers were also quite close in age to the Aboriginal students and they were conscious of the need to keep the relationship a professional one. The journal entry reflected these feelings:

We have to set an example and not be their friends so much. It is okay to ‘muck around’ with them but at some point a line must be drawn in the sand that says – we are here to teach you and help you to learn or improve your learning. (Sarah)

The need to clarify the terminology of ‘friend’ was noted in the researcher’s journal as a concept to be ‘bracketed’. The researcher did not want to assume knowledge of this term, given that the pre-service teachers viewed the concept of friendship as a challenge to their professional role as teachers. The second area of data analysis for Week Three
of the experience related to the literacy pedagogy of the pre-service teachers and followed closely from the findings of Week Two.

**Literacy pedagogy**

In reviewing the learning logs of many of the pre-service teachers, mention was made of the use of specific literacy assessment tasks to gain a greater understanding of the Aboriginal students’ literacy levels. Some of these tasks included ‘running records’ to show word recognition, fluency, comprehension, and shared reading strategies. The reality of the difficulty of the tutoring task was being realised by some of the pre-service teachers. A number of the Aboriginal students expressed very negative attitudes to reading as they were aware of their very low level of ability in reading. However, the Aboriginal students displayed a genuine willingness to learn, consequently evoking a strong feeling of obligation by the pre-service teachers to help and support in whatever way was possible:

My visit in Week Three was the first time I had heard my student saying that something I had asked her to do was “shame”. I am familiar with this term so I understood what she meant when she had said this. My student is happy to cooperate and do the work, but when I mention the project and the presentation for the end of the term she gets particularly embarrassed about having to show so many people her work. I think she is especially embarrassed because the project she is presenting will be about herself and One Arm Point. I am trying not to see this feeling of “shame” as being negative and working with my student to build her confidence and make her feel comfortable about presenting all of her hard work. This will be a slow process but I think by Week Nine my student will be proud of her efforts and want to show her peers and teachers her work. (Elizabeth)

As mentioned above, there was a strong emphasis on building the Aboriginal students’ literacy skills through the strategy of developing a “My Story” project. A wide variety of topics was discussed and formalised during the Week Three sessions. Some
of these projects included: PowerPoint presentations on football, building a Ferrari car model, personal profiles, a magazine, 3D timeline, university entrance application, Legend and Leaders book and a poster on ‘My Place’. It was hoped that such an approach to the learning tasks would assist in the students’ engagement and also enable some explicit literacy instruction.

Of interest in the journal reflections for Week Three, was the recognition by the pre-service teachers of the need to minimise the distractions for their students during the tutoring session. Some spoke about moving apart from their peers to enable a more focussed and targeted lesson. Others mentioned avoidance strategies that they felt the students were trying to use such as “talking a lot to avoid the written task” and the challenge of managing these. Another issue for one pre-service teacher was the pace at which the student worked. As stated in her reflective journal:

The worry that I have is the pace that teenagers seem to work ... Anna [my student] constantly drags her feet, talks to her peers in the school ground, in her language and tries to stall things as much as possible. I am not sure how to react in a situation like that. (Jimi)

Cultural Awareness/Aboriginal Education

The areas of cultural awareness and Aboriginal Education have been addressed together as many of the journal entries of the pre-service teachers cross both concepts. The experience of working with their Aboriginal students contributed to a growing appreciation and understanding of cultural concepts by the pre-service teachers. There seemed to be a heightened interest and desire to learn more about Aboriginal cultural that was reflected in some participants’ journal entries:

It is a constant feeling of pride that is running through not only our session but across the whole atmosphere of the school. It is a pleasure to be amongst this feeling and although it is only a small part within the Aboriginal cultural perspective, I do feel that I am
becoming more comfortable teaching, dealing with and wanting to know more about their culture. Even as I write this reflection, the thoughts of the day and Aboriginal education and culture are at the forefront of my mind. I know how important education is and if I can make some differences in whatever way I can, I will keep trying.

(Cade)

Through the interest in the Aboriginal students’ cultural backgrounds, the pre-service teachers also reflected on the appropriateness of strategies they were applying as related to Aboriginal education. However, one participant stated that:

It is quite similar to any other classroom. You need to identify their interests and develop ideas around this. Just like any other students, they are going to lose interest if they aren’t engaged in the activity.

(Samantha)

Another area of challenge for some pre-service teachers was the use of the Aboriginal students’ home language. It was an eye-opener for a number of participants that their student spoke a traditional language. At times, it was difficult to understand what was being said as the Aboriginal students freely communicated together in their home language, which was foreign to the pre-service teachers. These experiences confirmed the need to address the concept of Standard Australian English as a second language for many of the Aboriginal students.

Service-learning

The challenges of the tutoring sessions were certainly coming to the fore-front of the pre-service teachers’ experiences by the third week of the program. However, the comments of the service-learning experience reflected the commitment of the pre-service teachers to fulfilling their role as tutors to the best of their ability. One journal entry of a pre-service teacher captured these thoughts of the service-learning experience:

All of this made me think there is so much we take for granted. We expect in our society for people to have proficient literacy skills but
A case study of Grace and her student, Matt.

As noted in the results of the Week Two experience, the interactions that the pre-service teacher (Grace) had with her Aboriginal student (Matt) were significant and worthy of special consideration and documentation. For this reason, the decision was made to follow closely Grace’s experience working with Matt. The previous week, Grace had great difficulty working with Matt and felt that there might be some underlying learning difficulties and issues. She recorded in her journal that she had sought advice from the School Literacy Coordinator and learnt that Matt had learning difficulties:

Ken (Literacy Coordinator) gave me a copy of Matt’s IEP (Individual Education Plan) which confirms his learning difficulties. Several members of staff also verbally confirmed that Matt has ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) at a level which needs to be given high priority in considering learning activities.

(Grace)

Gaining such information was a significant breakthrough for Grace as she was now able to plan an appropriate learning session, cognizant of the needs of Matt and strategies to support his learning difficulties. The comments in her journal were quite insightful as to the changes that she was able to make now that she had a greater understanding of the situation. She wrote:

Matt related well to talking about his learning needs. He appeared to appreciate having his opinion respected and this led to him trying really hard to maintain focus throughout the session. Having discussed and agreed that he needs breaks during learning, I asked if he wanted to take a break on two separate occasions when it became visibly obvious that he was struggling to stay on task. However, he
declined and was able to fight through his difficulty and continue working. In hindsight, it would have been beneficial to be more explicit in praising him for this achievement. At the end of the session, when I offered my personal commendation for how hard he had worked and stayed on task, he gave a triumphant drum roll on the desk. (Grace)

There are many important implications of structuring a service-learning program with a literacy focus that became very apparent as Grace was observed working with her Aboriginal student. She needed and sought support from the university staff and School Literacy Coordinator as to appropriate learning strategies and tasks. Discussion was ongoing and Grace planned learning experiences to actively engage Matt, and created an environment conductive to learning. Another journal entry by Grace highlighted the changes she made to assist Matt in his learning.

It was a great improvement working alone with Matt in the computer room. No distractions meant that he could stay focused for longer periods of time and get back to work much more easily. Also, he seemed to appreciate the value of our relationship in supporting him to achieve. (Grace)

Field notes emphasise the significance of the experience of Grace and Matt in understanding service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions, and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education:

I feel this is the real learning in the program: a teacher beginning with identifying his/her interests and needs, to research background knowledge of the student and then to plan lessons with the ongoing reflection. Colleague support and suggestions are important in managing such a complex student and implementing plans that can be flexible and carefully documented. This is so much about what teaching is about, and finding ways to engage the students. (Researcher)

As such the journey of Grace and Matt will continue to be documented weekly, and the results summarised in this section of the study. Overall, the summary of results
for Week Three, show important learning across all areas of the research study: personal and professional learning, literacy pedagogy, cultural awareness, Aboriginal education, and service-learning.

4.4.5 Week Four: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

There are many contrasting reflections in the data analysed from the Week Four learning logs, reflective journals and field notes. Some pre-service teachers were excited about the progress that their Aboriginal students were making, whilst others recorded frustrations in how little achievement seemed to be made. A more detailed analysis is presented using the subsections previously identified. The first of these relates to the personal and professional development of the pre-service teachers.

Personal and professional development

As has been the case in previous weekly reflections, the emotions of the pre-service teachers played a dominant role in the reflective journals and learning logs. Many entries highlighted the frustrations that were being experienced by the pre-service teachers as they prepared and taught their Aboriginal students. Such frustrations seemed to arise from the limited progress that was apparent in the Aboriginal students’ achievement. The pre-service teachers were fully aware of the learning tasks that needed to be completed; however, the time constraints were significant and contributed to the frustration levels. In contrast to these emotions, others were energised by the tasks undertaken and expressed enthusiasm and delight at the achievement of their students.
A second area of concern, for some the pre-service teachers, was their own level of self-confidence. Some pre-service teachers expressed doubt about their ability to meet the needs of their students and to complete the “My Story” project that was the focus of the service-learning experience. Despite such emotions, the pre-service teachers were philosophical about the situation and acknowledged their own learning. As recorded by one participant:

I’m learning to adjust my expectations of what we are getting out of each session. I was expecting too much and we weren’t getting through all the work. I think Karen[co-tutor] and I are getting used to having to be really flexible, whether it be technology doing what we want, or the student disengaging in the activity and us have to change to something else for a while then bring them back. (Samantha)

A common theme throughout the learning logs and reflective journals was the professional growth recognised by the pre-service teachers, despite the difficulties and challenges that they were facing. Some participants commented that they would be better teachers because of the service-learning experience. Others reflected on the organisational and time management skills necessary to ensure success in the tutoring sessions. The journals captured the journey of the pre-service teachers as they struggled with maintaining meaningful learning experiences that would focus the students. As stated in one journal:

The angst and joy come at different times ... Before I start ... I would think through in my head how today might go. I reflect after what happened and think “Could there have been things that I could have done better?” Sometimes I need to slow down. I do listen to the student but I am sometimes too quick to make a comment and move onto another topic. I have tried to keep things simple and structured; as often for me, I will feel flustered the other way, but it’s about having that happy balance. This is the angst I am talking about, but the joy happens when I do see samples of work ... like today I feel confident that our project of making a book can be a reality. (Karen)
The findings for Week Four, relative to the literacy pedagogy of the pre-service teachers through the service-learning experience followed closely from the findings of the previous weeks. These findings are presented under the same headings as previously stated.

**Literacy pedagogy**

Comments in the field notes of the researcher helped to set the context of the literacy learning for Week four:

There is a real sense of purpose today. The routines have been established and the students ... are well versed in the plans of the day. The groups formed quickly and soon became focused on the learning tasks. There is a variety of tasks undertaken to begin the session with many focusing on the reading aloud/reading together. UNDA students can be seen completing assessment tasks. They are really conscious of the learning log requirements and how important clear focused assessment needs to be. (Researcher)

These observations reflected the intentional literacy teachings that were the focus of the tutoring sessions now that the organisational structures of the program were established. Lessons were planned around key reading, writing and spelling outcomes that were the objectives of the experience. The direct instructional program MULTI-LIT (Making up for Lost Time in Literacy) continued for some as part of the tutoring session and journal reflections recorded a wide range of responses to such a program:

I am gaining knowledge about what Ethan [my student] is able and unable to do. His reading is quite good and I just need to focus on fluency and expression. His spelling is quite good although he forgets capital letters quite often and has to be reminded. I might need to teach him how to decode unknown words. (Hannah)

Many of the learning logs of the pre-service teachers recorded the progress that the Aboriginal students appeared to be making. There was a sense of achievement reflected in most of the journals, and an acknowledgement of some positive progress, be
this in simple spelling scores or reading comprehension strategies. As documented in one learning log:

It was very interesting to see that as I read him his written work to copy onto the computer, he changed sentences by using more descriptive language to make his work sound more interesting which was great to see. Another thing I noticed was that when he made a spelling mistake in ‘word’, he would check with ‘Spell Check’ and choose the correct spelling by reading the word he thought was most appropriate and then when he continued to use that word throughout his work, he had recognised the correct way to spell it and made the appropriate change each time. It was great to see that he had recognised and remembered the correct spelling to use again. (Lea)

Of significance in one pre-service teacher’s journal were the observations that she made about her Aboriginal student that led in time to the diagnosis of a hearing problem. She observed that the student did not appear to hear her when she stood behind him. Through further investigation, the pre-service teacher was able to ascertain the behaviours that made her suspect a possible learning difficulty. She records in her journal:

I noticed today that when I talk to Leif [my student] when I sit in front of him or stand behind him, he either cannot hear me or cannot understand what I am saying. I sat next to him for a while when I was reading to him and he was reading to me and he could hear me perfectly. When I am right next to him there is no problem but when I sit in front or stand behind him he can’t hear or understand me. It makes me think whether he sometimes has trouble understanding me or whether there is an underlining problem. When I talk to him I try to talk slow and loud. Next week I will stand behind him and talk louder and sit in front of him again to see if he can understand me. During my special needs lecture I learnt that some Aboriginal children from remote communities have problems with hearing which is called ‘glue’ ear so I wonder if that could be a factor. (Georgia)

From these observations, the pre-service teacher was able to discuss her concerns with a staff member from the school and an appropriate health referral was made. Consequently, the Aboriginal student was diagnosed with a hearing problem, and
assistance was given. The pre-service teacher felt very satisfied with herself as she had been able to respond to the needs of the Aboriginal student in a way that had previously not been recognised. Her journal reflection captured her sense of satisfaction through the experience:

I feel like I am making a difference to not only Leif’s education but also in my development as a teacher. He is teaching me so much about myself and by teaching him I am building on my own confidence. I feel like each week I am growing as a teacher.

(Georgie)

As in Week Three, the areas of cultural awareness and Aboriginal education are outlined together as many of the journal entries of the pre-service teachers addressed both concepts.

Cultural Awareness / Aboriginal Education

A message that seemed to be interwoven within many reflections of the pre-service teachers at this stage of the service-learning experience related to the concept of time and the need to complete the given tasks. Pre-service teachers were feeling the pressure of achieving specific learning outcomes, in contrast to some Aboriginal students who were relaxed and casual about the tutoring session. One pre-service teacher commented that such an attribute of her student had enabled her to review the whole concept of time. She wrote:

Culturally, the concept of time for Matt [my student] and I was quite different. He was very laid back and I felt a need to achieve a certain amount of learning in a given time frame. The culture of our society is driven by time but in Aboriginal culture time is only registered in terms of important events. Initially, this struck me as a negative factor in our situation as the challenge to include everything in ten short sessions was made more difficult by the lack of time sensitivity displayed by Matt. However, on reflection I felt this difference to be a positive influence as I joined Matt in accepting the inevitable passage of time and focused instead on making the learning as effective as possible. (Grace)
Another pre-service teacher also reflected on how time had impacted on him and the implications that he had felt for planning and teaching. He related the concept of time in his journal and wrote:

Aboriginal education I have discovered is something that cannot be rushed. Each week/session seems to go by in an instant which has made me take a step back and think like a teacher. I have found a new appreciation for planning and time management to try and get the most out of each session. If the planning is not thorough enough the objectives of the session get lost, and no real learning occurs. At the same time however, the boys need to be challenged and given time to complete the task which has been a fine balance. (Cade)

Maintaining the balance between task completion and a positive teacher-student relationship were highlighted by a number of journal entries. One entry made comment that to draw an Aboriginal student back in to a lesson needed to be done strategically and with sensitivity. Yet another pre-service teacher reaffirmed her self-belief when she was able to bring her students back into the session when they had become distracted. She wrote:

I realised that I do have skills in order to persuade the students to come back to what we were doing and addressing their disappointment or behaviour in regards to when plans change. I was able to vocalise my expectations and what it was that I needed from them. This is important as a teacher to have these expectations set out and said with respect and assertiveness so that you still can have control over what you are doing. (Karen)

In contrast to the experience of being able to draw the students back into the tutoring session, another pre-service teacher shared in her journal that she observed the opposite response. Her partner had adopted a ‘teacher-like presence’. Such a stance had distanced the Aboriginal student from her tutor and the lesson outcomes were significantly affected. The Aboriginal student was shy and embarrassed to show his
work, and felt uncomfortable in the tutoring session. She summarised these observations in her journal:

This incident clearly showed both of us just how important it is to have a positive relationship with students, as well as how important it is to cater your teaching style to each student. I feel too many people come into educating Aboriginal and teenage students with a hard, disciplinary approach when sometimes all these students need is to know we are on their side and there to help them. (Gayle)

Service-learning

There seemed to be an increasing appreciation by the pre-service teachers of the challenges and achievements of the Aboriginal students over time. Comments were made about the difficulties these students faced in living away from home, some so remote, and the struggles of learning Standard Australian English. Acknowledgement is made of the Aboriginal students’ strengths in being able to speak a number of languages. As stated by one pre-service teacher:

We were looking at a text with Aboriginal language words. It is easy to understand why these students can struggle so much in Standard Australian English, when you look at the blends and sounds within their words and compare them to Standard Australian English. They deserve a lot of credit learning two languages and most being away from their original homes. (Samantha)

A case study of Grace and her student, Matt.

As mentioned previously, the researcher followed very closely the experience of the pre-service teacher Grace as she worked with her Aboriginal student Matt, during the service-learning opportunities many of which were in contrast to other participants. The session in Week Four saw significant progress in the relationship between Grace and Matt. As Grace now had more information about the learning needs and interest of her student, she was able to plan her tutoring session to cater more appropriately. Such a session included the construction of a model car, as an integrated project to incorporate
all aspects of literacy learning. Grace had negotiated the project with Matt, following his interest in fast cars, and his decision to commit to seeing the project through. The session began with Matt being presented with the model car and beginning to read and follow the instructions for its construction. As recorded in the field notes:

There is great excitement as Matt opens the box and locates all the parts. He has really taken to the task and is following the instructions well. The model is laid out and the parts are all checked. These need to be washed in hot detergent water to remove any coating to make the paint stick. This is being organised and Matt is actively completing the task. Parts are laid out to dry while the opportunity is made to work on the computer and update the power point. Then it is back to work. I feel that this opportunity will open many doors for Matt and Grace to build a strong relationship. Grace shared that Matt had replied, when she said “It’s your project”, that he replied “No! it is OUR” project!” This certainly shows the relationship that they have built together. I know that this will be a worthwhile project and important that it is documented. Grace was so concerned about how to manage this student and now I feel she has really won him over. Time will tell whether the interest and focus remains. I do believe that Grace has really overcome the initial hurdles that she felt. (Researcher)

The progress of the service-learning experience of Grace and Matt will continue to be managed as a special case study throughout the results section of each week. In conclusion, the results of the Week Four data reflect varying progress within the tuition sessions. Concerns expressed by the participants are related to the Aboriginal students’ achievements, engagement and the ability of the pre-service teachers to address these needs. There is a growing acknowledgement of how important the relationship between the teacher and the student is to achieve positive learning outcomes.
4.3.6 Week Five: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

Personal and professional development

Once again the predominant theme from the journal reflections of the Week Five entries related to the relational responses of the pre-service teachers. For some of the pre-service teachers there were strong feelings of frustration and disappointment as their Aboriginal students were absent due to other events and hence could not participate in the tuition session. As a consequence, the pre-service teachers expressed various reactions to the absence of their students. The field notes of the researcher highlighted some of the pre-service teachers’ responses:

This experience certainly brings to light the strong emotions, feelings and relationships that drive a school of this kind. These need to be managed, shared and discussed with the inexperienced pre-service teachers as part of teacher education. I guess it’s being part of a school experience that really brings these to mind and it is only through the face-to-face experiences, opportunities, school events and connections with people in a school that highlights these challenges. (Researcher)

Again it was noted in the researcher’s journal that an assumption could not be made that all pre-service teachers would cope well with the demands of the service-learning experience. Although the pre-service teachers were viewed as ‘competent’ in their preparation to teach literacy, the reality of the actual tutoring experience was challenging their knowledge, skills and understanding in this area. It was essential that these assumptions be ‘put aside’ and the reality of the experience be recorded objectively.

Another area of concern mentioned by some pre-service teachers related to the need for high expectations, yet managing these in a way that was appropriate and achievable. The personal lives of the Aboriginal students needed to be considered yet it
was important to focus on the learning tasks and make the most of the teaching time. The entry of one pre-service teacher expressed such sentiments:

Whilst high expectations are important for the students, I believe that these expectations also need to be realistic. I found that towards the end of our time together I started to feel despondent about my achievements in supporting Matt [my student]. However, on reflection, I realised that I was setting my own expectations unrealistically high. Once these had been mentally adjusted I was able to appreciate how we had actually achieved much in our weeks together both academically and behaviourally. (Grace)

In contrast to the pre-service teachers who were making progress with their Aboriginal student on the learning tasks planned, others were recording entries that showed a different point of view; for example, one entry was entitled “One step forward, two steps back.” Such recordings were made as the pre-service teachers struggled to maintain the interest of their students. Another recorded that she too, was experiencing a negative attitude from her student and was uncertain how to manage the situation:

Today has been the first time I have actually felt like we hit a wall. Not quite sure what it was exactly but it was the first session since we began that I felt like I had no control over the session or my student. (Elena)

It seems like it is really hard for Ben [my student] to pay attention and it's like pulling teeth out getting him to complete written activities. I have not regretted this experience at all; however, it is now I am starting to get a little frustrated only because I can’t seem to connect or find something that Ben seems really engaged with. (Clare)

Analyses of some of these experiences related to learning in the area of literacy pedagogy and are outlined in the following section.

**Literacy pedagogy**

Although some pre-service teachers were struggling to maintain engagement with their Aboriginal student, the majority of participants were finding the experience
very positive. A variety of literacy strategies were being implemented and journal entries highlight some of the most successful:

In Week Five my student brought in a copy of a book. We spent most of the session reading this book and talking about One Arm Point. This was such a great session because it really motivated my student and me to keep working on her final project. My student read so much of this book independently and she was really happy to do so. I was really proud of her reading ability today. (Elizabeth)

Another pre-service teacher discussed how she had experimented with strategies for working with her student and found that sitting side by side was proving successful in developing the Aboriginal student’s interest in reading. Yet another shared the strategies she found successful in engaging and supporting her student, requiring her to plan “short burst of tasks” using a variety of experiences. She also stated that having the student work alone was more successful, than being in view of others which could be a distraction. Observations were made that indicated the value of the direct instructional program (MULTI-LIT) and the progress that was being made. Intentional teaching in literacy concepts were also highlighted in the Week Five journal entries, with spelling being a focus, and numerous phonic skills taught and practised. The entries of the pre-service teacher, Casey verified these observations:

I’ve noticed as I observe him type or write I’ve been able to pinpoint areas where I can help him with his literacy e.g. homophones, spelling, punctuation. This is helping me direct my literacy program. I am so proud again this week of his work efforts and cannot wait to hear more of his hunting stories next week. I am also going to aim to provide a structured literacy activity on capital letters and possibly introduce homophones. (Casey)

Cultural Awareness / Aboriginal Education

As the service-learning experience continued all pre-service teachers were increasing their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and education.
Some participants made powerful statements as to how they were being affected by the experience:

Being a part of Aboriginal education and having a small hand in their development as an individual (however small) and assisting their learning journey is an experience like no other. Witnessing Aboriginal education first hand with such a broad diversity of students has given me such a different outlook, one that I am very grateful for. I feel this experience has opened my eyes and helped me broaden myself and creating (hopefully) a more holistic well rounded teacher. (Cade)

Finally we started on the next page of the magazine article; today’s article is about Leif’s [my student] home town of Looma. He got really excited and was telling me everything about his home life; I found all his stories were very interesting. I am happy with the progress we are making. I am finding out more and more about Leif each week. Listening to his stories makes me smile. I feel like I am making a difference to Leif. (Gayle)

Acknowledgement was made by the pre-service teachers of how limited was their knowledge of cultural concepts. One Aboriginal student shared with his tutor the fact that he was going to be facing the “lore” when he returned home to his community. The term “lore” refers to the “kaartdijin (knowledge), beliefs, rules or customs” of the Noongar people (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, 2012, Home page, para. 1). The pre-service teacher was unaware of such a cultural practice and was embarrassed that she did not know more about the Aboriginal culture. However, he was not disturbed by her limited knowledge and happily shared other culturally relevant experiences.

Service-learning

The strength of the relationships that were building between the students became increasingly evident in the reflections of the Week Five journals. Despite many challenges, the pre-service teachers continued to highlight the learning that was part of
their growth as a person and teacher. Many positive comments were recorded and expounded the value of the service-learning experience:

What I learnt about myself this week is that I can be quite patient even if I don’t feel it. I am learning to be more flexible in acknowledging that some people just need more time even if we didn’t feel we have it or that we have to show our time. (Alexandra)

In learning about society I found that different cultures clearly privilege different things. Ally [my student] doesn’t have much interest in reading but seemed interested in writing to tell me about her mother and was eager to read my biography of my mum. I am finding it hard to find similar stories that we can relate together on ... When in my life have I ever gone kangaroo hunting with a truck? Or slid down hills on sheet metal and sliced off half my thigh? This program is good in being able to share those stories but I still find it hard to find common grounds to share so to speak. (Elena)

I truly love hearing about all of it and it’s great that he feels comfortable enough to share these details with me. (Casey)

A case study of Grace and her student, Matt.

The story of Grace and Matt continued in Week Five with significant progress being made with the model making task and some specific literacy learning. Whilst the model car was being constructed, Grace decided to develop a PowerPoint presentation with Matt, to record the weekly progress of the model making, and to apply literacy skills in a meaningful context. Consequently, during the lesson, Grace and Matt rotated between these tasks which in turn also assisted in managing Matt’s learning disability (ADHD). As Grace recorded in her journal:

I am seeing more and more smiles from Matt in general which is great. I loved the confidence with which he approached both the capital letters task and the model making. (Grace)

As stated previously, the journey of Grace and Matt will continue to be documented each week, as the service-learning experience is quite unique and valuable for the research study. To conclude, the conceptions of the pre-service teachers in the
Week Five journals, learning logs and field notes reflected a deepening of the connections, relationships and experiential learning of all participants.

4.3.7 Week Six: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

A variety of learning opportunities and reflections are recorded in the journals of the participants for Week Six. These are documented using the structure outlined for the previous parts of the chapter.

Personal and professional development

A common theme that was evident in many of the journal reflections for Week Six related to the challenge of maintaining the Aboriginal students’ interest and motivation with the learning tasks. In some situations, the enthusiasm of the students’ engagement with the initial project was waning. Hence the pre-service teachers needed to review the learning goals of the tuition time to be more achievable and realistic. One pre-service teacher stated:

The boys are starting to slow with their enthusiasm towards the tasks; however, they are remaining engaged ... This has opened my eyes into setting realistic and achievable outcomes for the students each session. Not only does this make the boys feel success, it actually is more comforting for ourselves knowing that we achieved what we set out to do. (Cade)

However, despite the attitude of some Aboriginal students, other pre-service teachers shared how successful the tuition session was for them. In particular, one participant was excited about the way that she had enabled the lesson to follow the Aboriginal student’s interest, rather than rigidly delivering the lesson planned. She states:

I really learnt a valuable lesson from today ... that when something works, or when a student shows an interest in something that can be
utilised to improve their learning in some way, then it is best to run with it. If I had stopped with the *My Place* reading and gone onto writing a recount as I planned, I am 100 percent sure that I would not have had the same high quality learning taking place, which occurred as a result of being flexible and taking advantage of my student’s interests. (Elena)

Another pre-service teacher, whose student was absent for the tutoring session, took the opportunity to assist the college Literacy Coordinator, as he was marking assessments and entering results into the college data base. This was a very valuable experience for the pre-service teacher as she was consolidating her knowledge about language conventions and seeing the importance of data collection.

*Literacy pedagogy*

Through the weekly lessons, the pre-service teachers focused on improving the literacy outcomes of their Aboriginal students. Such a goal presented challenges every week and the journal entries often reflected such a dilemma:

Again Leon [my student] and I worked on another story for his project as I have come to realise he really enjoys sharing his hunting/fishing stories and is a great chance for me to help his writing and I think he is becoming a stronger writer each week. He is remembering the points he needs to focus on e.g. capital letters, full stops. A challenge I am finding with his writing is that he writes as he would speak and sometimes, when he re-reads it to check for errors, it sounds correct to him as it is written as he would say the story. I am not quite sure how to tackle this issue but I think if I invite him to re-read his work and try and view it from another perspective and check to make sure it reads fluently it might help. (Casey)

The pre-service teachers often shared their challenges during the tutorial that followed each of the weekly tutoring sessions. The opportunity to connect with others facing similar experiences was valuable and provided a network of support and collaboration. Some participants expressed concern that the lesson often centred on
completing the project, and hence was not solely literacy focused. However, there was a sense of satisfaction and a pride by the pre-service teachers in what was being achieved:

I am still worried each week though that I have not been focusing on specific literacy issues but rather explain focus areas as I observe them and teach them to him while he writes the work for his project. I am really enjoying each week with Leon and really looking forward to the project coming together and giving him a chance to showcase his work and I really hope he is proud of what he has done because I am truly amazed and impressed. (Casey)

_Cultural Awareness /Aboriginal Education_

A theme that emerged in the reflections of several pre-service teachers in Week Six concerned the apparent minimal expectations of some of the educators working with the Aboriginal students. This was especially evident in the journal of one pre-service teacher who was offered employment at the college as a teacher assistant during the period of the research study. He was concerned that the emphasis in some classrooms was more on “getting the students through” as against achieving to the student’s full potential. He writes in his journal:

There is a huge focus on “getting them through” which in a way is good, but it is hard for me to just to sit back and witness. It reinforces society’s expectation that they can just “get by”, where I feel the need to try and drive these kids to want to succeed because I know they can do it. (Cade)

Another issue that arose for some pre-service teachers was the concept of “shame” that became evident when working with the Aboriginal student. This seemed to be more pronounced when the students were working in close proximity of peers. However, by simply moving or changing the tutorial location the problem was minimised. It also impacted on the gender mix and the male and female students were eventually located in separate areas for the tutoring sessions. Of interest in one journal entry was the
comment that related to the humour of the Aboriginal students that was beginning to show as the relationship with the pre-service teacher strengthened:

The boys get quite cheeky with you if they get too comfortable! I have built a very good relationship with Len [my student] and he is starting to be quite cheeky … I don’t mind though, as long as he is smiling! I learnt how much I like the Aboriginal humour and their cheekiness. I am having a fantastic time with these boys and love to talk to all of them. (Julie)

A case study of Grace and her student, Matt.

The story of Grace and Matt in Week Six was in contrast to the positive learning experience of the previous week. The reality of the task that Grace and Matt had undertaken was realised in Week Six when the challenge of constructing the model car began. When Matt commenced assembling the car parts together, Grace recognised the difficulty that Matt was encountering in following the written directions. She writes:

Unfortunately I had not foreseen the added difficulty of Matt not being able to look at the parts he had and correctly position them according to the diagram. He started out very positively but I had to stop him because I could see that he had some of the parts in the wrong positions. I kept encouraging him to look at the diagrams and place the parts so that they matched, an interpretation he found quite difficult. (Grace)

Matt chose to leave the task to Grace and moved away to the computer and continued to work on the PowerPoint presentation. However, in time he overcame his frustration with the model making and returned to assist in the construction. As Grace recorded:

However, he did come back to it after I had worked on putting the first part of the engine together (within earshot of Matt). I was pleased when, after a break, Matt rose to the challenge of sticking the final parts together. I made a point of telling him that I wanted him to do it so that he could also feel proud for his part in the construction. (Grace)
In observing the interaction between Grace and Matt it is easy to see that their relationship was deepening and the level of respect for each other was growing. Grace was appreciative of the way that Matt had responded to her and the requests she had made during the lessons. She frequently praised him and his actions were immediate and with no complaint. Her final statement in the journal entry for Week Six reflected her feelings:

It has been refreshing to find that a simple comment, “I think we’ll put the magazine away now” or request “Matt can you go and find some newspaper and help me get set up?” – has been met with immediate action on Matt’s part and no sign of complaint whatsoever. The moody, complaining boy who was described to me before I met him has yet to surface. I am ever hopeful that he won’t! (Grace)

Service-learning

As the experience continued, the depth of reflections by the pre-service teachers highlighted the personal impact of such experiential learning. The researcher noted in the field notes how a number of participants were changing their attitudes to Aboriginal people and education. One participant shared how the experience had changed her mind, whereby previously she had been sceptical about teaching Aboriginal students she now saw things from another perspective. As recorded in the field notes:

I believe this is really the essence of the experience. There can be quite a change in attitude, perceptions and empathy following experiential learning of this type. The tutorial session that followed really focused on the concept of service-learning. This was useful to highlight how this experience is different from merely tutoring. I really feel service learning adds a significant depth to the experience. (Researcher)

The impact of working directly with Aboriginal students was clearly evident across all journal entries; however, the depth of the experience is truly reflected through the statement by one participant:
I am learning a lot about myself, my beliefs and how, when I become a teacher the effort that I will put in to try and achieve the most out of each student I ever come across. As I write this, it is a very humbling feeling to know that in such a unit, service-learning has allowed me to really delve deeper into my own teaching philosophy and values. I am grateful that I have been given this opportunity and try to appreciate each moment. Throughout the experience I have started to feel fuller ... More comfortable, more aware of what is out there in the real world, where I will soon be. It is a scary thought but an exciting one nevertheless. (Cade)

Another theme that emerged from the service-learning experience was the sense of support and collegiality that developed as the participants worked together to plan and deliver the weekly tutoring sessions. Some pre-service teachers expressed how important such a structure was to enable them to manage the many challenges of the experience. One participant wrote how she now viewed her peer:

I have to admire Gayle as a person and teacher in this whole process. She has a connection with the boys and their culture and you can see that she loves doing what we are doing. Getting together each week and planning for the following weeks to come is a great way for the two of us to throw around ideas and eliminate those perhaps might not work. Sure we have given the boys tasks that they might not have enjoyed, but that has only helped us create new ideas that will interest them. Being able to help each other out and be close to someone you work with is great and I can only hope that I work with a teacher in the future in the same way that Gayle and I worked together. (Clare)

By the conclusion of Week Six, many pre-service teachers expressed satisfaction with the progress made by their Aboriginal student and the project being developed. Another participant shared how she felt pleased with herself after hearing a positive comment from a staff member about her student. She hoped that her influence had contributed to the change in the student’s attitude and achievement and her reflections mirror these sentiments:

When I was getting a laptop off the library teacher she asked me which student I had and I told her. She told me how she had noticed an improvement in his attitude and literacy in the past few weeks.
This put a huge smile on my face and I really hope that I am contributing to this success. (Julie)

4.3.8 Week Seven: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

Personal and professional development

Journal reflections, learning logs and field notes all captured the strong emotions of the pre-service teachers during the Week Seven experience. The pre-service teachers were very conscious that there remained only the current tutoring session and the following week to complete the “My Story” project that was to be presented at the “Gallery Walk” in Week Nine. Consequently, there was a tension in the group to have as much work completed as possible. The absence of a number of the Aboriginal students caused mixed reactions and emotions from some of the pre-service teachers. One participant shared her frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction, envy and panic in her journal entry at the absence again of her student. She expounded:

As next week is the last session, I am panicking about the final product for the “Gallery Walk” ... Another thing that I am disappointed is that I am wondering whether or not Carol[my student] has learnt anything, as we have gone 2.5 weeks without revising any work as she was late to the previous session ... I have been thoroughly enjoying my time at the college but I am left with a sense of dissatisfaction as my student, Carol knew that I was present at the school every Wednesday morning but has failed to show for 2.5 sessions; which is a lot of time wasted. Moreover, I feel envious as I look around at the other groups doing successful work for their presentation next week and I am left there in limbo wondering if Carol will show up or not. (Vivian)

Vivian’s reaction to the absence of her Aboriginal student is a marked contrast to that of another pre-service teacher, Samantha who appreciated the time to reflect and finalise the work she had completed. Observations made in the field notes document the
progress that the pre-service teacher had made with her student and hence was unperturbed by the absence of her student:

Samantha takes everything as it comes and nothing has really been a problem for her. She has worked diligently with her student and together they have made a book that has been created using a computer program. This is now being sent to a commercial company and is currently being printed in time for the Gallery Walk. This achievement really shows how focused Samantha has been with her student to complete the task in a timeframe that will enable this to happen. (Researcher)

Yet another pre-service teacher reflected on her Aboriginal student’s absence and shared her frustration as she too, was having difficulty completing the learning tasks for the “Gallery Walk”. She had difficulty accepting that the student’s attendance was so strongly influenced by the events in the student’s family life and that school attendance was not a real priority.

Literacy Pedagogy

A theme common to a significant number of the journals was the recognition of what had been achieved through the service-learning phenomena, particularly related to literacy outcomes. As one pre-service teacher noted in her lesson reflection:

After listening to Kyle [my student] read I am really impressed with his increase in fluency, code-breaking skills and how loud he reads. His confidence has increased and I am really pleased to see him engaged and willing to read an article out aloud without too much resistance and with little assistance. (Lea)

Similar thoughts were documented by another pre-service teacher as she reflected on the work that was achieved with her student, she stated:

I am really pleased with the final product she has produced. It shows excellent progression throughout the term. It also shows she has retained knowledge and is attempting to implement it, particularly in regards to academic writing. (Nelly)
Another pre-service teacher noted that her student’s spelling results had continued to improve during the term and that he was applying these words to his daily writing. She was pleased that her student listened to everything she said and tried to complete all his work. They had almost completed the magazine that formed part of their “My Story” project. A different approach was taken by another pre-service teacher to engage her male student, through the writing of a letter, as if he were an Aboriginal elder. The focus of such a letter was to give advice to parents about what they could do to help their children. The topic connected well with the Aboriginal student and he wrote in silence for thirty-forty minutes, even working through the morning tea break to complete the task. Such an achievement was a breakthrough for both the tutor and student.

Cultural Awareness /Aboriginal Education

The journal reflection of one pre-service teacher in the Week Seven entries was an example of the depth of emotions that arose as part of the service-learning experience. She openly wrote about how mixed her feelings had been. She wrote:

The service-learning journey has pulled my emotions up and down and all over the place … each week I am planning for a different age group, for a student who hasn’t shown the slightest interest or presented me with an interest in anything, who forgets homework and other documents sent home, who runs off as soon as a session is finished but seems reasonably happy when we are in the middle of a session. (Alexandra)

In following up on this experience, it was revealed that the female Aboriginal student concerned ran off to avoid attending the tutoring session in the school library. Such action evoked feelings of frustration and annoyance from the pre-service teachers until it was discovered that the female Aboriginal students were uncomfortable working
in close proximity to the male students also working in the library. The response from the pre-service teachers was one of great relief for they blamed the students’ misconduct and realised it was not so. Alexandra wrote:

I felt stupid … How could we have not seen or picked up on this situation? … Finding this out made both Elena[co-tutor] and me feel so much better as we originally thought it was because they hated our lessons and didn’t want to do them anymore. (Alexandra)

Such a strong reaction from the female Aboriginal students certainly highlighted the cultural aspects of working with Aboriginal students and the ignorance of those working with them, in this situation. Another incident that was a reminder of the cultural aspects of the tutoring situation was recorded by a pre-service teacher whose student lived at the boarding facility:

For the session of Week Seven my student wasn’t herself, she was very quiet and didn’t really want to do any work. Every week my student tells me how much she misses her family and One Arm Point. My student told me half way into the session that her family that was in Perth visiting had gone back up north. I felt really sad for my student because she was homesick and I know how awful that feeling is. I can’t imagine how it would feel for a fourteen year old who lives thousands of kilometres away from her home. (Elizabeth)

Adjustments were made by the pre-service teacher to the tutoring session as a consequence of finding out how the Aboriginal student was feeling and why. The pre-service teacher was pleased that she had been flexible in the tutoring session and accommodated the needs of her student. Her sensitivity to the Aboriginal student’s situation was noted by the researcher.
Service-learning

The impact of the service-learning experience on the pre-service teachers was again reflected in the journal entries. Many of these entries described how the experience had challenged previous assumptions about Aboriginal people and society’s stereotyping of them. The following entry highlights the intensity of emotions of the pre-service teacher, Cade, as he recorded in his learning log:

As a multicultural society you would think that we would embrace all people but, we tend to highlight the negative aspects of Aboriginal culture. During this experience I have developed an appreciation and respect for the culture, and to not just accept what has been laid out in front of me. More and more I have become comfortable with the culture, the people and their learning styles. This has translated into everyday living and now when I see Aboriginals in the street I want to know their stories, where they are from and actually engage with them. This service learning experience has brought Aboriginal culture and especially Aboriginal education to the forefront of my mind. (Cade)

Similar sentiments were reflected in the field notes of Week Seven that described the experience and the impact on many of the pre-service teachers:

However, I do not believe the extent of the impact of this experience can be judged by a student’s results or products. The depth of learning about so many things is immeasurable. As I read the reflections I see how much the pre-service students have learnt about themselves, their role as teachers, their knowledge of literacy and its fundamental skills, the opening of their eyes to the reality of Indigenous education, and the strong sense of connection to another human being regardless of their culture, colour or age. I am inspired by the reflections that I regularly read with the pre-service teachers acknowledging that their past experiences, perceived concepts and judgments of Aboriginal people have been inaccurate. (Researcher)

A case study of Grace and her student, Matt.

Once again the story of Grace and Matt was documented in the Week Seven field notes, learning log and journal showing the challenges and achievements of the
lesson. There was a conscientious effort by Grace to make every minute count in
achieving the goal of completing the model-making task. She pushed Matt to his limits,
only giving him a break when it was clear he needed one. However, his dedication to
the task clearly shone through as Matt maintained his focus and completed a significant
part of the construction. He was challenged by the task of interpreting the construction
diagram, and at one point gave up, but after a short break came back to complete the
task. Grace’s encouraging words seemed to build Matt’s confidence and the session
ended on a very positive note.

4.3.9 Week Eight: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

Week Eight was the last session for the pre-service teachers to work directly
with their Aboriginal students in a tutoring session as the final week of the research
study was the “Gallery Walk” and “My Story” presentation. Consequently, there was a
concentrated effort by everyone to complete all tasks and to rehearse for the
presentation.

Personal and professional development

Many of the pre-service teachers used the tutoring session in Week Eight to
consolidate the “My Story” projects that would be presented in the following week. As
such there was an atmosphere of focussed work throughout the College, and a sense of
achievement as the projects were finalised. One pre-service teacher was very excited
that his Aboriginal student had asked at the commencement of the tutoring session to do
some oral reading. Such a request was in stark contrast to the student’s previous attitude
to reading and showed the self-confidence that the student had built over time. The
journal entry of the pre-service teacher concerned clearly showed the significance of the reading initiative:

Immediately it struck me when Alex [my student] said “Can we do some reading today?” in an enthusiastic manner, that he was getting it. I mean that in the sense that he wants to read and understand how the strategies that we’ve taught him are helping. There was a beaming confidence about him that brought a smile to my inside, knowing that he had taken in what we had been learning was a great feeling. (Cade)

Whilst most of the pre-service teachers were celebrating the success of their students during the service-learning experience, one pre-service teacher expressed quite the opposite feelings. She doubted the contribution she had made to her Aboriginal student, and her own ability as a teacher. Her journal reflections were quite confronting and disturbing especially being well into the experience. She wrote:

I think I am not a great teacher because I don’t initiate enough. I almost take my lead from him and don’t, ‘make’ him do what he doesn’t want to do ... This is a very interesting and confusing environment for me because, I can’t be a mum, I am not a teacher and I am mature so I do have a lot more experience than the other students, yet I feel constrained because of myself really. I feel like I have to sit on my hands so to speak and not be myself. I am not doing what everyone else is doing and they are doing it really well and having great responses. (Sarah)

Following these reflections, Sarah was able to discuss her reactions with a staff member from the college who revealed that her Aboriginal student was relatively new to the school and having major issues in adjusting to the boarding environment. He was very shy and contributed little to the tutoring sessions. Sarah appreciated knowing more about her student and adjusted her expectation of herself and the student accordingly.
**Literacy Pedagogy**

In preparing for the presentation of the “My Story” projects, much of the tutoring session was given to rehearsing with the Aboriginal students for the event. Each group was asked to briefly introduce the project work they had completed and to share their story with the other students. Such a task was a significant challenge for most of the Aboriginal students, and the term ‘shame’ was frequently used. The concept of ‘shame’ is that of being noticed and singled out above others. As stated in Harrison (2012) “shame can dominate how many Aboriginal children think, talk and behave in the classroom” (p.53). Consequently, many of the students were hesitant about being part of the event, and the pre-service teachers found it difficult to manage such a response. Despite being concerned about the presentation at the Gallery Walk, there was a feeling of pride with most Aboriginal students and the pre-service teachers as to what they had achieved throughout the term of working together. Some groups took the opportunity to reflect on their feelings and to complete some self-assessment tasks. One pre-service teacher wrote:

Len [my student] completed a self assessment about how the whole term has been going. He wrote that he is really happy about the work he has done with me and that he has done a good job on the magazine. I also wrote he thinks he has improved on spelling, reading, and writing and learnt heaps of new words. I am very impressed with how Len has gone this semester and I think that he has achieved improved literacy skills. He absolutely brings a smile to my face. (Gayle)

**Cultural Awareness / Aboriginal Education**

Once again the issue of the Aboriginal students’ attendance was highlighted in the journal entry of one of the pre-service teachers. Despite having worked with the student all term, and completed a “My Story” project together, the Aboriginal student was not going to be at the “Gallery Walk” to present his project:
Towards the end of the lesson Len[my student] told me he was going to be away next week. At first I thought he was just joking. But no, he was serious. He has a camp next week. I feel a bit disappointed because it is all coming to an end today. (Gayle)

As mentioned previously, the ‘shame’ aspect of the Aboriginal students came to the forefront for many groups. One pre-service teacher recorded:

The boys were very reluctant about the presentation when we were speaking about it at the end of the session. We decided rather than cause anxiety over it for a week we would leave and just sort it out next week. (Samantha)

**Service-learning**

The impact of the service-learning experience was highlighted by the field notes of the researcher, where strong sentiments were expressed about the depth of learning that was evident in the weekly reflections. As recorded by the researcher:

It is through the service-learning component, where time is given to focused reflection, that a deeper appreciation of the experience is gained. This is the value of the study to see what this really means for pre-service teacher education. I am overwhelmed, every week by the learning that occurs, in so many different areas and it’s hard to put a finger on what each of these areas is. Each concept is so integrated, yet powerful in its own right. (Researcher)

**A case study of Grace and her student, Matt.**

In following the story of Grace and Matt, the challenges encountered were clearly articulated in the journal entry for Week Eight. Grace writes extensively about her personal reactions to Matt’s learning disabilities and how difficult it has been for her to truly maintain his interest and develop his literacy skills. She questions whether Matt has really learnt anything from the project, and that his inclusion in the program has
only been through the need for other teachers to have “him out of the classroom”. She was honest in her reflections where she wrote:

I found myself wishing that I could have a student who cared, as I think I would have gained so much more personally from the experience-from the point of view of my own learning about how to teach and support literacy learning. (Grace)

However Grace is philosophical admitting that Matt had achieved quite a lot as the model-making was now complete and the PowerPoint was finished. Yet she was concerned that she had not truly engaged Matt in literacy. Her journal entry concluded with the statement:

My hope is that, next Wednesday during the Gallery Walk that Matt has a chance to feel proud of what he has achieved. I hope he does, as that will have made all my efforts worthwhile. (Grace)

Again the assumption made by the university staff that these pre-service teachers were adequately prepared and competent to manage the challenges of teaching secondary Aboriginal students was noted in the researcher’s journal. The ranges of learning needs and in some case, learning disabilities of the students, were extensive. However, the service-learning tutorial sessions that followed each tutoring period were observed as a key strategy to support the inexperienced pre-service teachers.

In conclusion, the Week Eight service-learning experience ended with mixed emotions about the week to come. Week Nine would see the finish of the program in the school with the “Gallery Walk” and presentation of the “My Story” projects. A celebration was also planned to farewell both the pre-service teachers and their Aboriginal students after such an event.
4.3.10  Week Nine: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

As Week Nine was the final session of working with the Aboriginal students in the service-learning phenomena, the journal entries of the pre-service teachers recorded many mixed emotions. However, all entries described the “Gallery Walk” that displayed the “My Story” projects as a highlight of the experience. As noted in several journals:

The final week of working with my student was such an amazing experience. The presentation of the students’ projects and the whole school assembly was such a special day to have experienced. (Elizabeth)

Today was the presentation day and I was so incredibly proud of what the boys had achieved and even more humbled knowing they too were proud of their work. (Gayle)

All the “My Story” projects were displayed around the walls of the school hall on pin-up boards and tables. The pre-service teachers and Aboriginal students had planned the design of their display and how best to present their project work. It was expected that there would be a short oral presentation by each group on their “My Story” project to those in the tutoring program, thus constituting the “Gallery Walk”. Almost all Aboriginal students found the oral presentation a significant challenge that demanded the pre-service teachers intervene to support their students. Most were able to stand together during the “Gallery Walk”; however, for some the experience was overwhelming and they disappeared from the hall. Such a response, elicited many emotions as noted in one journal:

My student was feeling “shame” about the “Gallery Walk”. However, when the time came for the whole school to go for a walk around, my student stood by her poster the whole time. I had seen some students disappear at this time so when I saw my student standing by her work with a big smile on her face, I knew how proud she must have really been. (Elizabeth)
Further analysis of the Week Nine data is again presented using the structure of the previous weeks, the first of which relates to personal and professional development.

Personal and professional development

The significance of the service-learning experience on the personal and professional development of the pre-service teachers was highlighted extensively through the journal reflections of Week Nine. The majority of notations recorded these sentiments as shown below:

This experience has been so exceptionally rewarding and has taught me so much. I have learnt a lot about my strengths and how much I can handle, as well as how great it is to push yourself past those invisible boundaries to achieve your best. (Gayle)

My final session felt even more special as my student came and sat with myself and the other tutors during morning tea, while the majority of his peers had left the hall. I feel this showed the positive relationship we had formed and ended the unit on a complete high. (Elena)

In terms of professional development, the pre-service teachers shared how they had become better teachers throughout the experience. They had been able to really hone their teaching skills, yet were very conscious of how important was the building of positive relationships. As stated in one journal:

The boys have taught me just how important it is to cater for different learning styles, different personalities and the importance of a positive relationship. (Samantha)

The second area of data analysis is that of literacy pedagogy. Despite Week Nine not being a specific tutoring session for the pre-service teachers, rather the “Gallery Walk”, there were numerous entries that related to the pedagogy of literacy education.
Literacy Pedagogy

It was through the “Gallery Walk” that the Aboriginal students were able to demonstrate the literacy learning they had achieved over the weeks of working with their pre-service teacher. The whole school came to view the “My Story” projects and a sense of pride and achievement from those involved was observed. A variety of projects was presented, with very attractive displays incorporating multi-modal texts and colourful photographs. As the projects highlighted the interests of the Aboriginal students, there was a great deal of positive feedback and encouragement from staff and peers during the “Gallery Walk”. As a number of journal entries recorded:

It was also wonderful to see all the other students’ work and what each tutor had planned with their student. On a whole I was very impressed with all the work produced and loved collecting all the ideas as resources. (Mary)

It was so humbling knowing they too were proud of what they had completed and that they were excited to show their peers. (Lea)

In creating a project using the theme of “My Story” there were many opportunities for the Aboriginal students to share aspects of their culture and to display these through different media. These will be documented in the second area of cultural awareness.

Cultural Awareness

A highlight of the “Gallery Walk” was the rich display of artefacts that related to the Aboriginal culture. Stories were told of hunting and fishing, with photographs of favourite places to engage in these activities. As many of the Aboriginal students were from communities in remote parts of Western Australia, maps were created to depict these areas. Paintings were displayed and drawings completed to represent the student’s story. All in all, the service-learning experience enabled a true showcasing of Aboriginal culture through the eyes of a young generation of Aboriginal students. As
noted in so many journals, there was a very strong sense of pride, respect and achievement by those in the hall as they wandered around the displays and talked with the students’. This leads to the analysis of the data in the area of Aboriginal Education.

Aboriginal Education

Despite the overwhelming highlights of the “Gallery Walk” experience, there was one negative comment that certainly had a powerful effect on the pre-service teacher who heard it. She wrote:

Sadly, I was very disappointed in one of the teachers who questioned James’ [my student] ability to complete the work he did, and was hurt that a teacher would think so low of his student’s abilities instead of congratulating his achievements. I feel many people will continue stereotyping and associating a negative connotation with the Aboriginal people. I feel more confident than ever to argue back and show these people just how much of a rewarding experience working with these students is! (Gayle)

It was also noted by others, that it was rare to have an occasion that acknowledged the academic achievement of Aboriginal students. Normally the focus was more on the sporting accolades than students’ literacy work. As noted by one pre-service teacher:

Watching the students receive their certificates was a wonderful moment and made me exceptionally proud! We had watched them grow and develop over the past 10 weeks and it was very rewarding seeing them being acknowledged for an academic achievement. (Georgie)

The other major concern again for some pre-service teachers was the absenteeism of the Aboriginal students. Despite having worked together on the “My Story” project for over ten weeks, some of the Aboriginal students were not present at the “Gallery Walk”. For some pre-service teachers the frustration of having their student
away again was used as a learning experience. The journal entry of Mary clearly reflected such a sentiment:

I continue to learn just how flexible you have to be, especially in an Indigenous school. There is no guarantee that your student will even be at school on any given day so planning has to involve the likelihood that a single topic may take several sessions to teach. (Mary)

A case study of Grace and her student, Matt.

The final week of the service-learning experience, for Grace and Matt proved to be a very rewarding and positive experience. Despite having to work very hard with Matt, to ascertain an effective approach to meet his learning needs, Grace completed the model making task with him and displayed it effectively. Matt was too shy, and lacked confidence to orally present his “My Story” project of the model car to his peers as part of the “Gallery Work”. However, he did stand beside Grace as she spoke about all the work they had achieved together and explained the model-making process. He was proud of his achievement and happily shared the model car with his peers and answered questions once the group had dispersed and begun the “Gallery Walk”. Grace concluded her journal with an entry that highlighted the impact of the experience on her. She wrote:

I learned much about the Aboriginal culture and myself in relation to it and I feel I still have much to learn. The relationship forged between Matt and I underpinned everything and served as a vehicle for enabling our two cultures to work well together. Society as a whole would do well to foster improved relationships with the Aboriginal community to work at changing some of the inaccurate but ingrained stereotypical views which currently exist. (Grace)

The journey of Grace and Matt has been documented specifically as the challenges faced were unique and provided valuable learning outcomes for the research
study. These will be further discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis. Once again the service-learning experience has been captured by many of the entries in the pre-service teachers’ journals. These will be shared in the following section, as per the structure of Section B.

Service-learning

All of the journals of the pre-service teachers concluded the Week Nine experience with very positive and enlightening entries that described the impact of the phenomena of tutoring Aboriginal students. Many described the experience as being one of the best of their lives. It had changed perspectives and opened eyes to the challenges and rewards of working with Aboriginal students. As summarised by one pre-service teacher:

I have seen the effect this project has had on the Aboriginal students and for all of the university students. I truly value the outcome that service-learning has had on me and hope to be able to do more in the future. (Elisabeth)

Week Nine brought to a close the service-learning experience in the Aboriginal school. The session ended with a celebration morning tea and many emotional farewells between the pre-service teachers and their Aboriginal students. It was exciting to witness the respectful, trusting and deep relationships that were evident between both parties. As such, a debriefing session was held on the University campus in Week Ten with the pre-service teachers. The Aboriginal students also had an opportunity to give feedback on the experience through an interview and questionnaire completed with the staff at the Aboriginal school. The results of debriefing of the pre-service teachers are presented in the following section of Week Ten.
4.3.11 Week Ten: Summary of the participants’ conceptions

The research study was designed to explore the impact on pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education through a service-learning experience concluded with a tutorial session held on campus at the university. The focus of the session was to debrief with the pre-service teachers on the phenomena, and to reflect and celebrate the end of the unit of study. The pre-service teachers used the tutorial to discuss and share their feelings and opinions as to the impact of the experience. Many journal reflections highlighted the service-learning experience as both challenging and rewarding, as shown in the following entry:

Helping Len [my student] has been one of the best experiences of my life so far. It has opened my eyes to the Aboriginal culture and that these students really want to learn. I have gained knowledge, experience and confidence from this unit. It has helped me develop as not only a teacher but also personally. Len brought such a smile to my face each week. The skills I have learnt from my sessions with Len will help me in my own classroom one day. I am proud I chose this unit, I was paired with such an amazing student and we connected so well. I cannot express my feelings, it has been a fantastic experience and I can see myself working with Aboriginal students. I wish everyone could have this experience because if more people did there would be less of stereotyping and less of a negative view on the Aboriginal community. I have grown not only as a teacher but as a person. (Georgie)

There were numerous statements in other pre-service teachers’ journals that expressed similar sentiments about the service-learning experience and the personal and professional impact of the phenomena. The design of the research study aimed to explore the full impact of the service-learning experience on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Post-experience interviews were conducted with each of the twenty-four participants. The analysis of these interviews is presented in Section C of the chapter.
4.4 SECTION C

4.4.1 Post experience interviews of the pre-service teachers

The purpose of the post-experience interviews was to elicit the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education having completed ten weeks in the service-learning phenomena. The interview schedule was constructed to enable a comparison between the pre and post-interview responses. The questions were designed to inform the research study questions:

1. How does a service-learning experience impact on the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development?
2. How does pre-service teachers’ knowledge of Aboriginal culture develop through exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting?
3. What do pre-service teachers learn about literacy pedagogy as it applies to an Aboriginal context?
4. What do the educational providers perceive as the benefits of pre-service teachers’ input?

Each of the participants was interviewed after the service-learning experience and willingly shared their responses to the questions posed. The semi-structured interviews were based on eleven questions and these can be found in Appendix E: Interview Questions. Hence the interviews were recorded using the questions as the organising framework, with participant comments as supporting evidence.

*Question one: Tell me about your experience while participating in the diagnostic literacy clinic at the Aboriginal College.*
The responses of all the pre-service teachers were overwhelmingly positive as to their experience of the diagnostic literacy clinic at the Aboriginal College. Many participants stated that it was one of the best experiences of their life. Some spoke about the challenges of working with the Aboriginal students but also the multiple rewards that resulted from the one-to-one tutoring. The statements of two pre-service teachers reflected the sentiments of all participants:

I loved it. It was such a fantastic experience ... just the importance of building relationships with the students ... I made lots of connections with my student. (Elizabeth)

The best experience I have ever had. It really was ... the best opportunity ... and the best experience that I have honestly had up-to-date. I got a lot out of it as well ... like learning all about Len [my student] and even learning more about myself as a teacher. (Gayle)

Question two: What did you gain from the experience?

All the pre-service teachers clearly articulated what they had gained from the service-learning experience. Such comments are presented using the categories of personal and professional development, literacy pedagogy, cultural awareness, and Aboriginal education. In terms of personal development, a significant number of pre-service teachers described how the experience had increased their confidence in being able to work with Aboriginal students to achieve positive learning outcomes. Others felt they had gained patience and empathy for their student’s personal goal of striving for a better education. Some expressed a deeper appreciation of the value of regular reflection as part of the learning process, having maintained a weekly journal.

Professionally, the pre-service teachers shared that the service-learning tutoring experience had developed their skills and increased their repertoire of teaching strategies. There was a greater understanding of the importance of planning, revising
and reflecting on the effectiveness of the lessons presented. Feedback on the success of the lessons was immediate, as the students’ responses indicated whether they had understood the concepts and were engaged in the learning task. Many pre-service teachers acknowledged that they had learned to be more flexible in their approach, adapting to the challenges of the learning context.

In terms of literacy pedagogy, one pre-service teacher stated that she had gained significant knowledge in literacy learning, particularly in seeing literacy in practice. Others spoke of the need to teach basic literacy concepts as the students’ levels of achievement were very low. There was a real sense of achievement expressed by many pre-service teachers, especially those studying to be early childhood teachers, as they had been successful in teaching a high school student. As stated by one participant:

I gained more confidence because it was an high school student … I was a little bit intimidated at first to work with a year 12 student … I’m used to working with kindergarten through to year three students … So it was quite an age gap … both my student and I have learnt a lot through the experience … being able to teach a high school student … I have gained lots. (Vivian)

The opportunity of working with Aboriginal students was appreciated by all the pre-service teachers, and for many the experience had sparked an interest in learning more about the Aboriginal culture and traditional practices. For some pre-service teachers it was the first time that they had ever had contact with an Aboriginal person and hence, they had little knowledge of the Aboriginal culture. Such an experience had given the pre-service teachers a greater respect and understanding of Aboriginal people and the challenges they faced in society.
In terms of Aboriginal education, there were three important concepts expressed by the pre-service teachers. The first of these was how essential it was to build a positive relationship with the student based on mutual respect and trust. The second concept was the need to negotiate the learning goals of the lesson together. These goals needed to be partnered with high expectations of the lesson outcomes that were realistic and achievable. Third, there was a significant contrast between the hesitance and apprehension of the pre-service teachers initially, to the open acceptance of the Aboriginal students in participating in the tutoring program. As stated in the interview by a number of the pre-service teachers:

Just the way that they (the Aboriginal students) were so open and accepting of us coming into their environment … And yet we were really nervous about going into theirs … The Indigenous community is always portrayed as being … let’s say the difficult one … And yet in truth … We were the difficult one … (Helen).

I think that you can let the stereotypes lead you in … And that you label the whole lot of people with that … I think that I learnt that … (Sarah).

Thus to summarise the responses from the second post-interview question, the pre-service teachers stated that they had gained personally and professionally from the service-learning experience. They had also increased their cultural awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal education. Questions three and four of the post-interview followed with similar questions from the initial interview designed to elicit information about the challenges anticipated and those actually faced. Thus the results included responses from both the anticipated challenges and actual challenges. The interview questions were as follows:

Question three: Before the experience, you identified -----------as a challenge.

(Individual statements from the initial interview were discussed here). Can you
In reviewing the anticipated challenges, there were eight different areas of concern identified by the pre-service teachers: building a positive relationship; the balance of teacher/friend interactions; closeness in age of tutors and students; gender matches; diversity of interests; cultural differences; negative stereotyping; and, appropriate literacy teaching. Each of these challenges was discussed in Section One, question three, of this chapter. However, in comparing the pre-experience conceptions to those challenges actually faced, the responses were very similar. The overwhelming challenge identified by most of the pre-service teachers was that initially anticipated of building a positive relationship with the Aboriginal student within a very short time frame. As stated by a number of the pre-service teachers:

The first couple of weeks were just trying to build a relationship with my student, but once we had that it was fantastic … (Elizabeth).

I think the biggest thing that I took away was the relationships and how positive they need to be. (Karen).

Another challenge that faced many of the younger pre-service teachers was the need to maintain a professional relationship with the Aboriginal student, whilst wanting to be a friend and be liked by them. It was necessary to set clear boundaries to manage the teacher/student interactions. In a similar way, the closeness in age of the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students was perceived as a challenge and needed to be managed appropriately throughout the experience. The comment from one pre-service teacher gives insight into such a challenge:

The closeness in age ... They (Aboriginal students) knew why we were there ... And they took advantage of that … And tried to make us more friends … I think they did see us
as the teacher and they knew what our role was … And that was important … But sometimes I did get caught up in trying to be the best buddy … And then saying “No ... I am the teacher and you’re the student and this is what we’re doing.” (Elle)

As the service-learning experience continued, it became apparent that some of the Aboriginal students were quite uncomfortable working with other Aboriginal students of the opposite gender. This conflict became a challenge for some of the pre-service teachers until they realised the negative effect of the gender mix and hence, organised alternative groupings or separate working environments. A major challenge articulated by many of the pre-service teachers related to the weekly literacy program and knowing how to address the needs of their Aboriginal student. Many students had strong sporting interests and it was difficult to engage them in literacy learning, especially on days when sporting events followed the tutoring session. Some Aboriginal students were very shy and it was challenging to build a conversation. However, most pre-service teachers tried to find a common interest as a way of connecting with their student, yet for others it was more difficult:

He was just not interested. I think that made me realise I really need to work hard and help him with his motivation as well … He doesn’t get very motivated easily and that was a hard time, but other than that I didn’t really have many challenges. (Julie)

Another challenge that was highlighted by some of the pre-service teachers was their limited knowledge of the Aboriginal culture. At times there were misunderstandings between the pre-service teachers and their students due to an ignorance of cultural practices and terminology:

It was more the cultural and the age … I was scared of the age, and more nervous about the age than I was about that
But then when I got there it was like “Oh, oh gosh! I don’t know anything … about their culture.” We were writing a book and I said to him “What’s your town like?” And he just looked at me … Like “What doesn’t he understand about that?” And then I was like “Is it a small town?” and “or a big town?” … And then he said like “community”. And then I went “Oh look, I’m so sorry. I say town and you say community”. (Kate)

In conclusion, the initial challenges identified in the pre-conception interviews with the pre-service teachers were accurate, yet the degree of impact of such challenges appeared to be far less than first anticipated. The pre-service teachers seemed to be in control and to have developed strategies to manage such challenges.

Question five aimed to elicit further information about the pre-service teachers’ conceptions of working with Aboriginal students during the ten week service-learning experience.

*Question five: How did you find working with your Aboriginal student?*

There were quite contrasting responses from the pre-service teachers when asked about working with the Aboriginal students. Some pre-service teachers felt it was quite daunting, overwhelming, and scary and they were very nervous. Others found it was easy, no different to working with anyone, and very enjoyable. One pre-service teacher spoke enthusiastically about the fun they had together because her student had a great sense of humour. Another shared how her students told some funny stories and described them as “characters”:

You know I was really scared at the start … (Hannah)

Daunting at times … I was a little bit scared. (Clare)

That didn’t bother me at all that she was Aboriginal … I have worked with Aboriginal students and Aboriginal people, grown up with Aboriginal people. (Elena)
One pre-service teacher was very animated in her response describing the experience as:

Amazing … I thought originally it might be difficult because being female and being only a little bit older that they are … they were really respectful … They opened the doors for us … They listened. I found with Len[my student] he was so engaged, he was willing and really positive about what he was doing … there was no moment when he said, “I’m not doing that” … He did everything that I set out for him … I didn’t have any problem at all. (Gayle)

Yet another was distressed at the negative connotation expressed by others in society when she shared what she was doing in tutoring an Aboriginal student. However, her experience proved to be a real highlight and she was passionate to present a contrasting point of view. In the interview she stated:

There were so many people like before I started the unit (who) would say like “You’re going to need counselling after that!” … A real negative because there is that real negative connotation with Aboriginals in this area … And I was so proud when I’ve finished, coming out and saying, “It was amazing!” And wanting to tell them that “Like no … It wasn’t like that” … I formed this beautiful relationship with my student and only by looking at them do you know they’re Aboriginal … There was no difference … It makes me a little bit sad that there is that racist tendency; because the only thing that’s different about us is their skin colour … It just makes me a bit sad that people think like that … It’s really sad … (Georgia)

All in all, the pre-service teachers shared how positive they had found the experience despite some initial concerns and fears. In essence, for some pre-service teachers working with Aboriginal students was no different to working with other students, whilst others were conscientious of the need to respect and learn more about the student and his/her Aboriginality. The next interview question addressed the concept of teaching in an Aboriginal school and was framed using the following words:
**Question six: What do you believe is important in teaching within an Aboriginal educational context?**

Three main themes emerged from the question above. The first of these stressed the importance of building a positive, friendly and supportive relationship. Such a statement was reflected in almost all the responses of the pre-service teachers. As stated by two:

Relationships … definitely the relationships … (Gayle)

I think about building a relationship with the students, the first thing … If they don’t do that then they can’t go on to get them to engage in the learning … I think that is the most important thing … and then once they have got that relationship … All the learning that they do needs to be meaningful for them … Let them know that they are there for a reason … (Elena)

Many responses expanded on the concept of building a relationship with clarifying statements about how this could be done; getting to know each other; exploring interests; strengths and weaknesses; and, taking time to connect together.

The second common response to the question as to what was important in teaching in an Aboriginal educational context referred to the need to acknowledge and respect the culture of the students. As stated by one pre-service teacher:

Getting to know them and getting to know the culture is just so important … knowing what was important to Nina [my student] as an Indigenous student was so different to what I was expecting … what she valued in terms of her family was just so important … which is the (same with) other Indigenous students. (Nelly)

Furthermore, some pre-service teachers spoke of the need to be aware of the cultural practices related to eye contact, use of Aboriginal English, and the concept of “shame”. As mentioned previously, the sense of humour displayed by many of the
Aboriginal students was an unexpected trait that surprised the pre-service teachers, added enjoyment to the lessons but needed to be managed appropriately.

The third theme that arose from the answers to Question 6, related to the teaching style of those working with the Aboriginal students. It was articulated by a number of pre-service teachers that an approach to teaching that was seen as “forceful” and “pushy” had a negative impact on the students. It was essential to develop:

- Patience …
- Respect …
- Adaptability …
- and don’t take things too seriously …
- No one seems to take things too seriously and they (the Aboriginal students) do have a set goal and they want to achieve that …
- And they’re quite easy going about how they get there …
- So they’re not too forceful in their approach …
- which I think is good …
- You can see some teachers that are a bit forceful …
- A bit kind of “Do this or you miss out on things.” …
- And you can see the students …
- When I am observing and working there …
- They don’t respond well to that and they will react and ruin everybody’s classes …
- So you need to tread lightly … (Cade)

It was also mentioned by some pre-service teachers, that the expectations of both the teacher and the Aboriginal student needed to be high. Goal-setting together was considered a key strategy to achieve such an outcome. As a consequence, students’ self-esteem and confidence were often enhanced by goal setting and hence it was viewed as an essential characteristic of working in an Aboriginal educational context. Also important in teaching in such a context, was the notion of motivation, engagement and developing meaningful learning experiences. As stated by one pre-service teacher:

- Definitely motivating them and making sure it’s something that they want to do …
- So motivation and just having something that they are interested in and fun as well …
- that was very important … (Julie)

To conclude, the responses to question six, as to what was important in teaching in an Aboriginal context can be categorised into three key areas; building relationships;
acknowledgement, respect and recognition of cultural awareness; and lastly, adopting appropriate teaching styles. As is the structure of the thesis, these themes will be considered in depth through Chapter Five.

Question seven followed and was used to explore the pre-service teachers’ knowledge and development of literacy teaching practices through the service-learning experience. Some of the previous questions had elicited information related to literacy teaching: however, further clarification of literacy pedagogy was the focus of question seven.

*Question seven: What did you learn about literacy learning/teaching?*

Central to the service-learning experience of the research study was the literacy tutoring sessions of the pre-service teachers with a secondary Aboriginal student. The phenomena highlighted for many of the pre-service teachers just how essential competence in literacy was. A number of pre-service teachers were quite disturbed at the low level of achievement of the Aboriginal students, given their age, and how the lack of skills impacted on all areas of the student’s performance. Hence the need for diagnostic assessment was soon realised by the pre-service teachers. Many made comment that they had learned a great deal about the importance of diagnostic assessment through the weekly tutoring sessions. It had helped develop their skills in assessing basic literacy competencies and implementing strategies for the teaching of the foundation concepts.
The need for explicit teaching was acknowledged, with planning and reflection integral to the teaching and learning cycle. Some pre-service teachers who were involved in the direct instructional program, MULTI-LIT made comment that their Aboriginal student seemed to benefit from the structure of the tutoring session, making significant progress over the ten weeks. Others shared that the use of computers during the tutoring session proved a valuable tool in engaging the Aboriginal students in literacy learning. Games, multi-media texts, and contextualised learning experiences were shared as strategies that also helped to engage the Aboriginal students in the tutoring sessions. All the pre-service teachers were able to articulate the literacy teaching approach that they had undertaken. The response of one pre-service teacher encapsulated the depth of literacy learning and reflection for her during the service-learning phenomena:

You really need to be aware that students learn so differently and that to be able to get students up to that next level with literacy you really need to be able to zone in what works for them … diagnostic testing … the importance of diagnostic testing in literacy is massive and I think also integrating the different types of literacy … like with the speed writing … I made her verbally say it every time, editing, writing … especially when you are time restricted … being able to integrate the various aspects of literacy to get as much as possible out of the student. (Nelly)

Researcher: You achieved so much in such a short time?

Like when you’re doing it … It doesn’t seem that much … you definitely need that reflective process … when you look at it, I only had 8 hours with her and we produced a university entry essay. We produced 8 solid pieces of work that could be put on display … I just found that she … remembered, that she actually recalled it, absorbed it and used it … that was so rewarding for me knowing that it’s clicked … with any student seeing that moment when it clicks … it’s so rewarding. (Nelly)

Another pre-service teacher also explained eloquently the approach that he had taken during the service-learning experience. He stated:
It needs to be explicit … Even though you know they’re that age [secondary age] you can’t expect them to get something straight away without you actually kind of explicitly teaching them … They need to be taught it … It’s that explicit teaching of strategies. We were focusing a lot on reading strategies … and comprehension strategies … that needed to be repeated and applied in different ways … And not just on one type of text … Get them to view videos … They enjoyed engaging with technology … And using the computer and changing the text modes to suit what they were interested in … Yet still trying to accomplish the literacy that we were trying to do …

Researcher: How did you know where to start?

We came down to the prior assessments and what we had asked them to do … Like the questions about where they felt they needed help … And where they wanted help … All of them said reading and writing … And then just doing reading sessions … Out loud reading … Guided reading … We would read it and they would read … Test their pace and their fluency, reading a particular text and where it needs to go from there and what kind of words you need to focus on, and strategies on how to read, especially comprehension … They would often just read the text and not get what the text was saying … And so to get them to understand … And that took time to actually learn to read first and then to be able to get the information from it … (Cade)

The researcher gained a greater insight into the literacy teaching approaches of the pre-service teachers through their responses to question seven. The significance of the literacy learning that occurred during the service-learning experience will be further explored, analysed and discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis.

Question eight followed in a similar vein, where the researcher was keen to hear the pre-service teachers articulate the impact that the service-learning experience had on them professionally, as undergraduate teachers.

*Question eight: What did you learn about yourself as a teacher? Professionally?*
The uniqueness of the service-learning experience for each participant was highlighted through the interview process, particularly in answering question eight. Many shared the personal challenge that it was for them being inexperienced and young undergraduates in a secondary Aboriginal educational context. Self-doubt was a common thread in the responses of a significant number of the pre-service teachers. As one pre-service teacher shared:

I was really freaking myself out at the start thinking … I can’t do it, I am early childhood [teacher] … I can’t work with a 15 year old and I was really stressing out … But at the end of the day you pull yourself together and do what you have to do to get it done and you do it well … I guess I learnt that I am capable and if I apply myself I can do it … Yeah just that self-doubt. I’ve got to write it off … I’ve just got to really get over that … (Hannah)

In continuing the discussion with Hannah, she acknowledged that she had been successful in the tutoring program, and had enjoyed the opportunity to work one-to-one with an Aboriginal student. The challenge was great but she was proud of the way she had been to able to do it.

In a similar way, another pre-service teacher doubted the contribution she had made to the learning of her student. The female Aboriginal student had been absent for a number of sessions. The pre-service teacher found it very difficult to build a rapport, and received very limited feedback from the student during the tutoring sessions. The time constraints also influenced greatly the relationship, with the focus very much on “putting the poster together”. Consequently, her response to the question about professional learning was:

I really doubted myself as a teacher … I sound so negative … But I did get a lot out of it … But I still don’t know what I did with her … It was such a whirlwind … I don’t know that she actually benefited from me being there or not … For me … looking back … if I was to do it again, I would probably
try to get less out of her and have more time for reflection … (Jimi)

In contrast to these pre-service teachers, others shared how they had grown in confidence throughout the experience. The opportunity to be responsible for the tutoring session every week, had increased the pre-service teachers’ belief in their ability to plan, teach and assess that would be invaluable for the future. As stated by one:

I think I feel more confident so that next year on pract. [practicum] I will be more confident … especially in the planning of literacy … planning for individual kids, as I’ve had that experience now … that would be quite good … positive. So you know if you are in class and have students with different abilities you might have to adjust the curriculum. I will probably be able to do that more than what I could do before … (Linda)

For other pre-service teachers, the service-learning experience had been affirming for them in terms of their professional abilities. They had consolidated strengths in planning engaging and motivating lessons, developed greater flexibility in teaching style, and were consciously reflecting throughout the tutoring sessions. As mentioned in earlier interview questions, one pre-service teacher shared how she found the use of humour a key attribute of her teaching. It enabled her to create a relaxed environment that she believed promoted the learning of her Aboriginal student.

The dilemma of demarcating the teacher/friend relationships between the Aboriginal students and the pre-service teachers was again highlighted by the response of a number of participants to question eight. As shared by one pre-service teacher:

I don’t know if it’s a bad thing but sometimes … I tried to build a bit more of a friendship. I know it’s important but maybe more of a teacher role … I might need to learn where to put up a barrier and remember that I am the teacher …
And I build big connections with them … I need to recognise where it is ... as a student and friend. (Casey)

Others shared similar thoughts, acknowledging that the service-learning experience had highlighted the need to build positive, respectful relationships, yet the boundaries needed to be clear between that of a teacher and a friend. One pre-service teacher expressed concern that she easily became emotionally connected to her student and such a trait was detrimental to her professionalism. She was conscious of the need to manage her disposition in the future.

An interesting comment from one pre-service teacher related to the impact that she felt she had made with her Aboriginal student in a short space of time. Her student was very keen and enthusiastic to work with her and they developed strong connections very quickly. It also highlighted for her the need to be well organised and planned. Her comments reflected these sentiments:

I guess the impact that you can have on a child in a short amount of time … It’s quite remarkable really ... It’s the importance of being organized … The plan, teach and assess cycle … We saw in a real short amount of time … the importance of all of that … (Kate)

The experience of tutoring in a secondary context validated for a number of the pre-service teachers their decision to train as early childhood teachers. First, it made them reflect on the teaching pedagogy of the early years and how such an approach was also relevant and successful in a secondary context. It was especially appropriate for students with low literacy levels. Second, it made one pre-service teacher state emphatically that she wanted to work in an early childhood classroom and not a secondary school as the challenges were beyond her.
To conclude, question eight enabled the pre-service teachers to share the professional learning that they had gained through the service-learning experience. Although there were a number of unique responses, most participants shared confidence in teaching, pedagogical knowledge, and management of professional relationships as key areas of growth. Chapter Five will discuss these concepts further in view of all the data collected. The personal impact of the service-learning experience was the focus of the next question in the post-interview.

*Question nine: How has this experience impacted on you personally?*

In addressing the above question, all participants expressed how the experience had influenced them quite significantly. In particular, they were adamant about the way their perceptions of Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal culture had changed. The stereotypical views that many of the pre-service teachers had held were challenged and they now viewed Aboriginal people “in a different light”. Comments by many of pre-service teachers were reflective of the sentiments of many:

- It certainly opened my mind and I was a bit more open to the Aboriginal community as a whole ... like learning from one individual ... Not such a negative stigma attached to it anymore (Casey)

- Not being afraid ... being a lot more interested in that culture ... and wanting to know more about it ...(Cade)

- You know stereotypes are not always correct ... And stereotypes that are out there ... they [Aboriginal people] are just good people and if you give them the time of day ... they like to give it back ... (Hannah)

Complementing the change in perspective by many of the pre-service teachers was a new passion and desire to learn more about the Aboriginal culture. One pre-service teacher shared how he had been given a didgeridoo for his 21st birthday and the
service-learning experience had ignited a fresh interest in mastering the instrument, and learning more about the Aboriginal culture, history and language. Others shared a desire to help Aboriginal people to gain a better education and hence to help “Close the Gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous achievement and participation in society.

There was a strong sense of advocacy for Aboriginal people from the responses of many of the pre-service teachers to the question of personal impact. Some pre-service teachers shared how they became very defensive and, at times, quite annoyed and angry at the reactions of others when racist comments, or connotations were made about Aboriginal people or culture. Two pre-service teachers expressed such perspectives in their responses:

I find I don’t like it when people say bad things about Aboriginal people … I get quite offended which before I probably would have a laugh about it, but now I just back off and don’t say anything … Just to have a bit more respect for them as well, knowing how hard some of them do have it and how they could be … (Julie)

I always get mad when people say that but now I am like ... My student was like this ... Nothing like what you see on TV … they want to get an education ... They want to get a better life ... Their parents want them to get a better life ... That’s why they are down here … thousands of kilometres away from their parents and so that stereotype is wrong and I hate it when people are vocal about that now ... I always get angry and say No … I’ve seen it. You’re wrong ... (Linda)

Another consequence of the experience for some pre-service teachers was further affirmation of their desire to be teachers. As one pre service teacher stated simply:

It has reinforced my love for these people … and the Aboriginal culture … I have a great respect for them … I love teaching them ... (Elizabeth)
Others were excited about the positive outcomes of the teaching experience and how so much had been achieved in such a short time. Personal attributes had developed through the phenomena that included patience, flexibility, confidence, empathy and self-reflection. Some pre-service teachers shared how they had matured throughout the experience and were better placed to seek opportunities for teaching beyond previous situations. Indeed the personal experience had encouraged them to seek future teaching possibilities in Aboriginal education that may involve rural or remote teaching placements.

Question ten enabled the researcher to gain a greater insight into how the service-learning experience had influenced the pre-service teachers. Noteworthy, was the change of perspective of the pre-service teachers towards Aboriginal people and their culture. These pre-service teachers were now strong advocates for Aboriginal education and sought to help wherever possible. The post-interview continued with participants sharing their understanding of “service-learning”. Question ten followed up on the initial interview question, where the pre-service teachers were asked to share their understanding of “service-learning”.

*Question ten: What do you understand now by the term “service-learning”?*

All participants were able to articulate their understanding of the term “service-learning” with many clarifying their definition with examples from the phenomena experienced. In essence, the pre-service teachers shared how everyone involved in service-learning was learning in some way, the Aboriginal students, the pre-service teachers and the staff of the college and university. Many commented how valuable such an experience had been and would strongly recommend service-learning to others. It had helped make the link between theories learnt in university, to practical application...
in the classroom. Terms such as the “reciprocal nature” and “experiential learning” were used to describe service-learning. Some participants commented on the value of keeping a journal and how they had learnt so much about themselves in the reflective process of writing regularly. The interview comments of these participants are evidence of the depth of understanding and emotions that were evoked when addressing question ten:

Service-learning is fantastic … To be able to put back into the community while you’re learning about yourself is so great… And you learn a lot more about yourself, doing things … rather than just reading about it … So I think it’s just great and recommend it … and I would do it again … if it was available … (Jimi)

[The] whole of what we gained from it was amazing … We were learning a lot about teaching, our learning about us as teachers, as people … And yet are we giving enough to them? The whole reciprocal nature I guess … I think all teachers should have the opportunity to reflect with somebody because talking out what you are going through is so beneficial … (Sarah)

But that it’s mutually beneficial to both parties … what I was saying about Indigenous and non-Indigenous coming together … It helps strengthen the community in society as far as working together where they are seeing we’re learning … that we are learning as well as teaching and their learning … through their literacy from us … So the service-learning is just that really … (Karen)

To conclude the post-interview, the researcher asked each pre-service teacher if he/she had any additional comments about the experience. Most chose to make closing comments about the value of the service-learning experience, whilst only two participants felt there was no more that needed to be said. In summarising the comments made, three main themes emerged: enjoyment of the experience; value of service-learning; and, recommendations for future implementation of the program. The enjoyment of the service-learning experience was highlighted again and again in the pre-service teachers’ opening comments. Phrases such as “I just really loved being
involved”; “It was amazing”; and, “The best experience of my time at university” were repeated by many of the participants, as is evidenced in the statements below:

I just really loved being involved … And discussing with the other people in my year at university … they would have loved being a part of it … So I have been recommending it to everybody … It’s just a wonderful experience … In your resume’ … having that certificate … It is such a rewarding thing to have … It was such a wonderful experience to be part of and I feel really privileged. (Vivian)

But it was just an amazing experience really … Different perhaps to what you were expecting in the first instance … It took a lot of effort in the first weeks … And that wasn’t fun … but because of that so much more came out of it … Just the chance to work with one student … To see how much you could do for them … once you built that relationship, he worked so well for me … It was really lovely … (Sarah)

Yes it was just one of the best experiences in my three years of being here, it was great for so many reasons … I think the relationship with Greg [my student] and obviously the benefit that we learnt along the way … No it was great. (Kate)

The pre-service teachers also acknowledged the value of being a part of such a service-learning experience that reiterated previous comments from the post-interview questions. Some mentioned the support structures that were part of the organisation of the Unit of Study and were grateful for these. As stated by one pre-service teacher:

I had a great time … it was really worthwhile … and all the guidance … really helped with the confidence of myself and everyone else … knowing that you were always there to help … I think we were well prepared to go … even though it wasn’t very structured … you can’t have it too structured because all the kids were different … and having that partner support … so having that support system with the partner helped in the confidence and the abilities of myself and everyone else. It was just good to hear what everyone else was doing. If anyone was having a hard time … it was reassuring and it was not just me … people were having positives … reassures … we are all humans … (Linda)
One recommendation that came through from a number of pre-service teachers was the need to promote the opportunity to be part of the unit of study with other students from the university. There was a very strong feeling about the importance of having the opportunity of working face-to-face with Aboriginal students to enhance essential pedagogical skills as part of pre-service teacher education. The concluding comments of one pre-service teacher captured the essence of the service-learning experience:

It’s amazing the changes you can see across one term with one-on-one teaching. It’s phenomenal ... I was working in the hall at most times and watching the other students the way that the relationship changed and the way the quality of work changed just from week to week, in that hour and a half. One-on-one, is just invaluable ... For students who had issues with attendance to be looking forward to coming to school ... It was just fantastic … (Nelly)

Closing comments from the case study of Grace and her student, Matt.

In the post-interview with Grace she reiterated many of the challenges, frustrations and highlights of the journey she had undertaking working with Matt during the service-learning experience. She clearly articulated the value of the experience in her words:

In all, my experience at the [Aboriginal college] was a positive one. I had to work hard to diagnose Matt’s learning needs and ascertain an effective approach for him but my efforts were rewarded as both he and I grew in our learning over the ten week period. I learned much about the Aboriginal culture and myself in relation to it and I feel I still have much to learn. The relationship forged between Matt and I underpinned everything and served as a vehicle for enabling our two cultures to work well together. Society as a whole would do well to foster improved relationships with the Aboriginal community to work at changing some of the inaccurate but ingrained stereotypical views which currently exist. (Grace)
In concluding the post-interview with Grace, she expressed appreciation for the opportunity of participating in the service-learning experience. Analysis of the case study of Grace and Matt will form an important part of the discussion in Chapter Five. The post-interviews closed with the researcher thanking each participant for his/her contribution, encouraging the pre-service teachers to add further comments about the service-learning experience in the future, if they so desired. The researcher again reiterated the research procedure of member-checking and outlined the proposed timeline.

The fourth question of the research study aimed to ascertain the impact of the service-learning experience from the point of view of the staff at the Aboriginal College. Thus the question was posed: how do intervention recipients perceive the benefits of pre-service teachers’ input? The aim was to explore the effect of the intervention of the one-on-one tutoring with the Aboriginal students by the pre-service teachers, as perceived by the college Principal, Literacy Coordinator, Teacher Assistant and School Chaplain. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with these key staff members involved in the service-learning experience. Hence four interviews were conducted and the results presented in Section D of the chapter.

4.5 SECTION D

4.5.1 Interview with the college Principal

The college Principal was keen to share his perspective of the service-learning experience involving the partnership between both educational institutions; the Aboriginal college and the pre-service teachers from the University School of Education. He began the interview by explaining the background to the partnership, and believed he had found “gold”, by connecting his college with pre-service teachers who
were willing to undertake tutoring with the Aboriginal students. Previous tutors were untrained volunteers and lacked the educational background to be really of benefit to the learning of the Aboriginal students. In connecting with the university undergraduates and seeing them work with the Aboriginal students, he was confident that there was a greater educational focus and achievement of literacy outcomes. He had also made the observation that the pre-service teachers seemed to display a genuine interest in the Aboriginal students and connected well with them. He made particular mention of a pre-service teacher who had shared a book that she had made in her own schooling with her Aboriginal student. As a consequence, they agreed to create a similar book together that would focus on the life story of the Aboriginal student. This example, the Principal explained showed the pre-service teacher’s ability to connect with the Aboriginal student, his identity, culture and interests. These attributes were essential for successful learning especially within Aboriginal education. In his words:

The part that I would say to dealing with Indigenous students is that you have to try and connect … One-on-one is a good connector … What topic will we do? What about your life? Your place? Your ideas? That’s an instant winner … Your interests … Those were all done but you have got to … connect on that learning basis … With Aboriginal children if you are yelling at them, you’ll just get louder back the other way … It’s proven … you can try to prove it again if you like … But the teaching craft is top of the pile …

Another important factor that the Principal believed added to the value of the service-learning experience, was the clear plan devised between key staff from both institutions. It enabled the program to be well organised and student achievement documented, systematically. He also explained how there was a “celebratory phase” that was essential in the partnership plan, providing encouragement to the Aboriginal students and acknowledgement of the work achieved. He stated how he had frequently
heard positive, supportive comments from the pre-service teachers to the Aboriginal students, and noted the increase in confidence of both as the program continued.

Aboriginal College staff were also aware of the work of the pre-service teachers and were grateful for the positive, friendly dispositions that they displayed during the tutoring sessions. The Principal commented that the pre-service teachers had been able to manage the professional and personal relationships with their students successfully, something that was essential for future teaching. He believed that the pre-service teachers had gained many skills from the service-learning experience that would be transferable to other educational contexts in time. He acknowledged that the program had gone from “strength to strength” and that it was important in education that partnerships between schools and universities needed to be supported and encouraged. As the Principal concluded:

In this case we’re partnering with a tertiary institution that is in the business of producing teachers … But I think all schools … need to have partnerships … A learning partnership is great … These graduates will be the frontline … They have got to have the X factor … But the talent and the craft that you need is going to come into a big time focus.

Following the interview, the researcher arranged for the transcription to be checked by the Principal and thanked him for his contribution to the research study. The next interview presented was that of the Literacy Coordinator at the Aboriginal college.

4.5.2 Interview with the Literacy Coordinator

In commencing the semi-structured interview, the researcher asked that the Literacy Coordinator clarify his role in the college and the service-learning program. It was noted that he was responsible for the whole school literacy program, that involved
organising and managing the literacy classes, school testing administration and staff allocation in literacy tuition. He also acknowledged the work of the Teacher Assistant in supporting the literacy program, and her coordination of the tutors, in one-on-one literacy support. In addition, both staff members were the key contact personnel in the service-learning coordination between the Aboriginal College and the University School of Education. The question was then asked:

Researcher: I am interested in your perceptions on the impact of the service-learning tuition program between the Aboriginal students and the pre-service teachers. Could you comment on how you see the pre-service teachers have managed this experience?

Literacy Coordinator: I think it’s highly beneficial that we need to appropriately train pre-service teachers in how to effectively engage and teach Indigenous learners … And that’s why I see great benefit in the program … It actually gives student teachers meaningful learning experiences with Indigenous students and I guess they can sort of practice or enact some of the things that they read about through university here with us … And it makes the learning and the teaching through university a whole lot more meaningful … They can actually apply those skills or strategies that they have learnt …

The Literacy Coordinator elaborated on his perceptions of working with the pre-service teachers. He was concerned that many had not had any experience in working with Aboriginal students and hence saw great value in the opportunity that the service-learning program was giving them. He added:

And that’s why it’s quite nice having this program. It actually inadvertently gets people [pre-service teachers] once they take ownership of their student, then they start by wanting to do the best by the student … So they will read widely and they will read not only the readings that are prescribed to them but also well outside the area … that pertains to their specific student’s needs … Or whatever they think would be helpful for the student … So that’s how I pretty much see it … how beneficial for a student teacher or pre-service teacher in doing a program like this.
From his observations, he noted that the pre-service teachers were challenged by the service-learning experience and often forced to move “out of their comfort zone”. He believed such a situation was positive. It enabled the pre-service teachers to engage with Aboriginal people that they normally would never have had the opportunity to do, from places as remote as One Arm Point, Halls Creek, Derby, Looma and the Kimberley. The question was then posed as to the impact on the Aboriginal student in working with a pre-service teacher on a regular program. He was animated in his response:

I think one of the things that you can see … just that enthusiasm, wanting to be a part of something bigger or greater … And one of the things that we see a lot is … the changes in the kids … that they want to come and they want to do work and they want to engage in meaningful learning.

He also added how important it was for the Aboriginal students to have someone they know who cares about them, really wants them to succeed and is there for them every week. Many of the Aboriginal students had struggled with such a role in their personal lives and the program was giving them the opportunity to connect. In his words:

So even if it’s for a 10 week, 20 hours sort of thing … for that term they have someone who absolutely cares for them … is there just for their sole purpose … helping them … making them a better person … Both in the literacy but also developing themselves and their skills … So that’s one of the changes I’ve seen in the kids … and just their willingness now to engage.

He continued to share how such an experience for the Aboriginal student could also lead to that “light bulb” moment where they realised their potential to go on to “bigger and greater things”. As he stated:
I guess a whole new world has been open to them … and now they just want to explore that … that’s another great change that we have seen in the kids …

Thus the next question posed to the Literacy Coordinator related to the academic achievement of the Aboriginal students as a consequence of the service-learning program. In his response, he was emphatic that academic achievement had been seen and he specifically related the example of one student. This student had been deemed to have a reading age below 10 years of age, with his chronological age being 16 years. He was now in Year 11 and the intervention had seen his results “skyrocketed”, where it was believed he would achieve graduation in Year 12. The Literacy Coordinator stressed the need for early intervention as many of the Aboriginal students were coming to the College with significant gaps in their learning. The service-learning program was helping to address some of these areas. It was also acknowledged that the indicators for success must be considered on an individual basis, with the focus on the growth of each Aboriginal student, in contrast to the standardised assessments of national testing, or school graduation. He made specific mention of the direct instructional program MULTI-LIT and how the achievement of the students was reflected in the levels of performance as they progressed through the intervention.

The researcher continued the interview with a question that sought to ascertain other areas influenced by the pre-service teachers’ input. The Literacy Coordinator responded that the “Presentation Day” had been an important opportunity for the school staff to come and see what the pre-service teachers had been doing with the Aboriginal students in the service-learning and literacy tutoring program. He described the experience:
When we have the Presentation Day … it is a good opportunity for teachers to come in and see what other teachers do … As teachers we get locked up in our classrooms and get very few opportunities to develop professionally … It is very hard to see, to keep renewing your practice, finding new skills and so when we do have those Presentation Days, you see a number of staff come through and they were really engaged in what other people have done … And it really gives them ideas of where they can move forward to … And I think that’s another by-product of this experience.

The final question of the interview with the Literacy Coordinator related to his perceptions as to what was important in the teaching of Aboriginal students in the college. It was worded:

*What do you believe is important in teaching in an Indigenous educational context? What message would you want to give to young teachers about what they need to consider in this kind of Indigenous setting?*

A thoughtful, considered response was articulated by the Literacy Coordinator. He spoke of three main concepts that he would want pre-service teachers be conscious of when teaching in an Aboriginal educational context. First, it was his belief that there needed to be a “culturally appropriate curriculum” that was meaningful and relevant to the Aboriginal students. Second, the teaching pedagogy needed to be sound, “a good teacher has a good teaching pedagogy”. He stated that this was no different to teaching in any classroom. The third concept related to the perceptions of the students. He believed that the “perception … It is for the kids to perceive that you are a good person and that you truly care for them …”. He admitted that at times it was difficult to maintain the balance of being the teacher and the friend and “at times the boundaries get blurred, but that is the nature of a relationship.” He concluded with the words:

But it’s really about personal relationships and that is the biggest key when you’re working with Indigenous learners … It is that personal relationship.
To conclude the semi-structured interview, the researcher invited the Literacy Coordinator to make any further comment about the service-learning program. He was quick to share that he believed it was “fantastic” and that he was excited that the partnership between the Aboriginal college and University would ensure an ongoing and sustainable service-learning program for the future.

The next staff member to be interviewed was the Teacher Assistant who worked closely with the Literacy Coordinator, and managed the tutoring support program. She had an integral role in the liaison between the Aboriginal college and the University staff in establishing and managing the service-learning program.

### 4.5.3 Interview with the Teacher Assistant

As was the schedule for the semi-structured interview with key staff members, the researcher gave the opportunity for the staff member to clarify her role in working at the Aboriginal College. The Teacher Assistant stated that her primary role was that of tutoring and the coordination of outside tutors involved in the MULTI-LIT instructional program. She was then asked to share her perceptions of the impact of the service-learning program both on the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students. First, she commented that the pre-service teachers were eager and excited about working at the Aboriginal College. She observed that the pre-service teachers who had little or no experience with Aboriginal students were nervous but keen and open to learning in this context. They frequently asked questions, sought background information about their student and readily acknowledged they had so much to learn. They were keen to try new things, recognised when something was not working and asked the opinion of the Aboriginal college staff as to possible alternatives.
Second, she believed the Aboriginal students gained a great deal and were eager, interested and keen to be part of the service-learning program. It was a change from regular classroom routines and it was something they were interested in doing. Working with a non-Indigenous pre-service teacher was also viewed as beneficial to the Aboriginal students. Many of the Aboriginal students came from communities where there were no non-Indigenous people and the service-learning experience gave them the opportunity to build a relationship in this way. She was very keen to share the success of the program through the achievement in the MULTI-LIT instructional program. Student data were shared as to the improvement in reading ages of Aboriginal students involved in the program. The achievement of a number of students was significant in terms of progress through the program and consequent increase in reading ages.

Of particular interest to the Teacher Assistant, was the complete change in attitude and progress of one Aboriginal girl in reading. The student had never engaged with reading a book for pleasure in her life, until she began working with one of the pre-service teachers. The pre-service teacher introduced her to a text that she had seen as a movie. In the tutoring session, they read parts of the text together. At the close of the session, the Aboriginal student asked if she could borrow the book to take home to read. As the Teacher Assistant shared:

And I think it was Kay [pre-service teacher] who brought the book in and Lisa [her student] borrowed it … And took it home and actually started reading it … And I tell you that just threw my heart … She never really thought about reading because you enjoy the reading … Other than something that you just have to do in class … She can actually enjoy it … reading can be something that you enjoy … So now she’s actually interested in reading on her own. It’s wonderful! But the fact that now her literacy is so much better … she can read on her own … And that makes the difference as well.
The discussion continued and the Teacher Assistant shared the ongoing achievement of this Aboriginal student. Her progress in literacy learning had seen her move into a higher English class and teacher feedback noted this student as one of the better students. The Teacher Assistant also believed that the pre-service teachers benefitted from working in a school environment where they had to negotiate their role, interact with other staff members and learn about “real life employment” in a school environment. It also enabled them to use resources such as MULTI-LIT that may assist in the future with classroom teaching.

The final question of the interview was also to gain the Teacher Assistant’s advice about teaching in an Aboriginal context. She simply stated that the teacher “needed to care about the individual”, an attribute she observed in the pre-service teachers participating in the service-learning program. She added it was important to have a disposition that recognised there was not one “right way”, and to be open to asking the students “how they feel about certain things, their culture and be respectful of them”. She shared how the biggest issue for Aboriginal students was feeling that the teacher did not respect them. It was very important that teachers conveyed to students the message that “I am going to help you to learn what I feel will help [you] be successful in the general world ...” In closing, the Teacher Assistant shared how she believed the program had been “fantastic” with so many benefits to all concerned and the ongoing learning for everyone involved. Again, the researcher invited the Teacher Assistant to share further comments if she so desired. She was happy to complete the member checking process and a feedback time was negotiated. The final staff interview was held with the School Chaplain and the results documented accordingly.
4.5.4 Interview with the School Chaplain

Following the structure of the other staff interviews, the researcher asked the School Chaplain to clarify his role in working at the Aboriginal college. He responded by describing himself as a Christian Brother who had worked at the college for almost 12 years. In his role as School Chaplain, he felt that he did not have a “position of power” and viewed this as an advantage. As such, he was able to build relationships with all who worked at the college and interact in whatever way was appropriate. Some would seek him out to share worries or concerns, others to gain advice or be a listening “ear”. In a more formal way, he was involved in the ‘Driver Education’ program, assisting the Aboriginal students to gain their driver’s licenses. At times he would help with bus driving and vehicle maintenance.

The School Chaplain was then asked to share his perception of the service-learning program, both on the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students. He responded readily by stating “It’s a multi-multi bonus … because it is a two way thing”. He expanded on this statement by adding that he could see how quickly the Aboriginal students engaged with the pre-service teachers and the confidence imbued in both. In his words:

… it’s a very, very pleasant thing to see that relationship and it’s a non-threatening relationship and they [the Aboriginal students] are not afraid to make mistakes … that flows over to the [class] teachers and they’re getting better responses from the kids … so that gives them more confidence … it’s a multi-structured thing … having one-on-one, it’s hard to beat … it gives the students so much more confidence.

He also described the encouragement that he had observed the pre-service teachers giving the Aboriginal students as “magic”, and watched as the students’ self esteem grew and grew. He felt that the students and pre-service teachers were becoming
friends and giving each other encouragement and confidence as they built a relationship together. He stated:

… so white people are going to see the they’re not all nasty Aboriginal people … and they [the Aboriginal people] see that this person is smart and this person is willing to be my friend … and basically what it gives them is much more of a balance … Young people are helping to bridge that gap in so many ways ... it is so important I believe ...

The School Chaplain continued to share his beliefs about the service-learning program. He noted that many of the Aboriginal girls seemed to almost “copy-cat” the female pre-service teachers in the way they took pride in their appearance and dress. He felt this was a positive influence. He also mentioned how the level of communication between the pre-service teachers and Aboriginal students seemed to develop as the program continued. Communication skills were viewed by him as so essential and an area that many of the Aboriginal students struggled with. He felt that these skills were developing and each year more and more of the Aboriginal students were displaying confidence in standing up in front of people. The service-learning program was seen to be assisting in this area of communication.

The researcher was keen to seek the advice of the School Chaplain as to what he believed was important in teaching in an Aboriginal educational context. The immediate response that he gave was to acknowledge and learn that Aboriginal people “are different and they pick up on smaller things …”. He expounded on his view that Aboriginal people have a very finely tuned sense of body language. They quickly judge whether a person was genuine or “bull-shitting”, reading body language far more sensitively than non-Indigenous people. Hence he would advise those working with Aboriginal people to be very aware and to closely observe body language in all aspects
of classroom life. He strongly encouraged the use of non-verbal strategies in the classroom, and for the teacher to ‘look’ and to not “always use words”. However, first and foremost he stressed the need for the teacher to build a relationship that was genuine, caring and conveyed a belief to the Aboriginal students in their ability to learn and achieve.

In concluding the interview, the School Chaplain shared his concern for the future. He felt that it would take a long time “at least 100 or 200 years” to really achieve full equality and to change the outlook of non-Indigenous people towards Aboriginal people. He believed that non-Indigenous society continually created “hurdles” for Aboriginal people. In his words:

We put up the hurdles for them ... we are the main ones that are so negative and can be so negative and we’re stunting a whole gifted people … we must show a willingness to learn from them too.

However, he did conclude that new generations of Aboriginal leaders were emerging and this would certainly increase the possibility of greater equality. The researcher acknowledged the participation of the School Chaplain in the interview process and shared the research process of member checking.

4.6 Conclusion

In summary, the results of the research study exploring service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness with regard to Aboriginal education through involvement in an Aboriginal educational setting have been presented in Chapter Four. Four sections documented the data collected at the three stages of the phenomenological study: pre-experience conceptions
(Section A); during the experience (Section B); and at the conclusion of the service-learning experience (Section C). Staff from the Aboriginal College was interviewed at the conclusion of the experience and the results presented in the final section of the chapter (Section D).

Chapter Five analyses and discusses the phenomenology results, in view of the research study questions, and pertinent literature related to service-learning, literacy pedagogy, cultural awareness and Aboriginal education.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

Chapter Five discusses the results of the investigation into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. To begin, the structure and context of the service-learning experience are discussed in light of the findings of the research study. Then, the four research questions are used to frame further discussion with specific reference to the results of the service-learning experience and the pertinent literature.

5.1 Service learning structure and context

As the impact of the service-learning experience on pre-service teachers was the focus of the research study, it is important to expound how the key epistemological elements of service-learning were applied. Service-learning is experiential learning in a real life context, with structured opportunities for reflection and reciprocity being recognised and valued. The key elements of service-learning were carefully considered by the University staff when planning, structuring and organising the unit of study. Hence the service-learning experience incorporated the elements of the model developed by Jacoby (1996). First, in terms of experiential learning, the experience was based on collaboration between the staff of the Aboriginal College of secondary students and those in the University School of Education. The essence of the service-learning experience was to have the pre-service teachers from the university tutoring the Aboriginal students to help improve their literacy skills and language competence. The first principle of service-learning as stated by Jacoby (1996) is that “those being served control the service(s) provided” (p. 28). Accordingly, the Aboriginal College staff
initiated the service-learning experience, determined the Aboriginal students to be engaged in the program, articulated the focus of the tutoring lessons, and organised all logistical factors.

The second principle of service-learning was then initiated; “those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 28). It was hoped that the one-to-one tutoring program would improve the literacy competence of the Aboriginal students and this, in turn, would improve their achievement in other learning areas. Staff of the Aboriginal College was interviewed to ascertain the impact of the service-learning experience on the students’ literacy learning. An induction session for pre-service teachers was conducted by the staff from both institutions, at which the nature, structure, expectations and organisation of the program were articulated. The tutoring program was clearly outlined with background information about the college provided, cultural aspects clarified and Aboriginal student profiles shared. The pre-service teachers were to instruct the Aboriginal students in basic literacy concepts; however, the pre-service teachers were able to determine how to deliver the instruction.

The third principle of service-learning identified by Jacoby (1996), that of reciprocity, was identified many times throughout the experience as the pre-service teachers indicated that they were gleaning new insights about themselves as both teachers and learners. The acknowledgement of the reciprocity of the experience was encouraging as the aim of the research study was to explore how the phenomenology of the service-learning experience impacted on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Findings relating to the pre-service teachers’ perceptions are discussed in this chapter.
A fourth principle of service-learning is providing structured opportunities within a given program for the purpose of reflection (Jacoby, 1996). Each week, University staff held a one hour tutorial with the pre-service teachers with a focus on reflective practices. The pre-service teachers also maintained a journal of reflections throughout the ten week service-learning experience. As advocated by Cone and Harris (1996), the reflection process, when facilitated by an educator, has the potential to have “a profound effect on student’s intellectual and personal growth …” (p. 34).

5.2 Research questions

Consistent with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, the researcher has drawn from all of the data collected during the phenomenological experience as the basis for the discussion of results. The initial interview consisted of eight questions, designed to elicit the pre-experience conceptions of the twenty-four participants. Journal reflections, learning logs and field notes documented the learning during the ten week service-learning experience. At the conclusion of the experience, a semi-structured interview with each participant followed up on the responses to the initial interview questions. The pre-service teachers shared their views as to the impact of the phenomenon on their knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. Figure 5.1 summarises the findings of the research questions, each of which is then discussed in detail.
5.2.1 Research Question One

How does participation in a service-learning experience impact on the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development?

Discussion of results relevant to research question one are addressed in five different areas:

- change of perceptions;
- building positive relationships;
- self-awareness and confidence;
- awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal people and culture; and,
- goals and aspirations.
5.2.1.1 Change of perceptions

In addressing the impact of the service-learning experience on the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development, one needs to consider the reasons why many of the pre-service teachers participated in the program. Over half of the participants had never worked with an Aboriginal person before or indeed, spoken to one. For these pre-service teachers, the experience of interacting one-to-one with an Aboriginal student had a profound effect on them both personally and professionally. Such a finding is consistent with that of Cone and Harris (1996), who state that the service-learning experience can have a profound influence on those involved. Many of the pre-service teachers expressed the view that Aboriginal people were frequently portrayed in a negative way. Indeed the emotions of the pre-service teachers in beginning the service-learning experience were those of being nervous, scared, terrified, anxious, fearful and overwhelmed.

In contrast, the emotions described by the pre-service teachers at the conclusion of the study were those of utter joy, enthusiasm, passion for Aboriginal people and delight at the experience undertaken. Some pre-service teachers shared how the experience was the best they had ever, that it was “mind boggling”, how they just loved it and would never forget the lessons learnt. As stated by one pre-service teacher:

I loved it ... I was really anxious at the start ... I was thinking “Oh my goodness”, but I loved working with the students … It was a big eye-opener … I am just so glad I did it ... a very good experience. (Hannah)

The extent of the learning and depth of the experience was captured in the words of another pre-service teacher:

The best experience I have ever had … it really was the best opportunity and the best experience that I have honestly had … like learning all about Len [my student] and even learning
more about myself as a teacher. I can’t believe how much you learn, not just as the teacher but personally. (Gayle)

It is important to reflect on how the participants’ perceptions of Aboriginal people completely changed through the face-to-face interactions with the Aboriginal students. For many of the pre-service teachers, they had only encountered negative, denigrating and racist comments about Aboriginal people and their culture. Such views were expressed by some of the pre-service teachers’ family members, peers and the media. These stereotypical perceptions of Aboriginal people were really challenged by the pre-service teachers throughout the experience of working directly with the Aboriginal students. Frequent comments were made by the pre-service teachers as to how respectful, well-mannered, polite and eager to learn were the students in the tutoring program. Consequently, the pre-service teachers now became advocates for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture. A number of the pre-service teachers shared how they would become angry and emotional if conversations centred on the negative stigmas of Aboriginal people. Indeed they found it difficult not to speak out and defend Aboriginal people.

In essence, the service-learning experience of the pre-service teachers working directly with the Aboriginal students had a positive, deep influence on the perceptions of the pre-service teachers. There was a heightened self-awareness and awareness of others through the direct contact and experience during the ten week service-learning program. All participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experience and that they had a deeper understanding and respect for the Aboriginal students and their culture. Indeed, it was a life-changing experience for many and one they would not forget.
The findings of the research study are consistent with the literature on service-learning and the impact that it can have on participants. Indeed, the essential elements in the development of a “critical consciousness” (Cipolle, 2010) discussed in the literature review of Chapter Two are consistent with the research findings, with many of the pre-service teachers developing a greater “self awareness, awareness of others ... and social issues leading to the advocacy stance and promotion of social change” (p. 11). Through experiential learning, the pre-service teachers had their “eyes opened” to new ways of seeing Aboriginal people and in doing so they began to change their perceptions.

Bandura’s (2002) social learning theory provides a useful framework for interpreting the service-learning experience of the pre-service teachers. Three stages of the learning cycle are described in the model of social learning; “first is the idea that people can learn through observation. Next is the idea that internal mental states are an essential part of the process … and that just because something has been learned, it does not mean that it will result in a change in behaviour” (Cherry, 2013, p.1). The change in the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of Aboriginal people occurred as a function of the observed and direct experience, reflection of that experience and expression to others of the new insights gained. These findings are consistent with those stated in Hackett and Lavery (2012) that “an experience may be so profound that there is an impact upon a person whilst still immersed in that experience. This significant experience is sealed upon a person’s being that affects his or her actions and attitudes” (p. 14).

The learning may become transformative, involving the whole person “cognitively, affectively and spiritually” (Hackett & Lavery, 2012, p. 14). Indeed, for many of the pre-service teachers, the service-learning experience changed their perceptions of Aboriginal people. The importance of “such attitudinal change … will
become the catalyst for them [pre-service teachers] to enhance their own capacity for delivering education that empowers Indigenous students to get what they want from their education …” (Herbert, 2012, p. 41). By pre-service teachers having a deeper understanding, respect and empathy for Aboriginal people, they will be better prepared to teach in a culturally responsive way, which will likely engage students and begin to change attitudes towards education.

5.2.1.2 Building positive relationships

Analysis of the data from the research study identified the need to build a positive relationship with the Aboriginal student as central to the service-learning experience. As stated in Harrison (2012), “The quality of the relationship between the teacher and the students counts as much as the quality of the teaching” (p. 153). All participants recognised the importance of developing a relationship and viewed it as an area that could be a potential challenge for them. However, through careful planning and lessons designed to promote authentic learning within the context of positive relationships, the pre-service teachers soon found the Aboriginal students very receptive and keen to learn. As stated by one pre-service-teacher:

Relationships ... Relationships are the most important thing to begin ... for the students to get to know you on a personal level ... and the teacher getting to know the student on a personal level ... and we just found lots of things in common ... to help our relationship ... (Vivian)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Hattie (2009) who acknowledged that “Learning is a very personal journey for the teacher and the student ...” (p. 23). Hence the pre-service teachers found that it was essential that appropriate strategies were executed within the context of building positive relationships. The service-learning experience enabled these relationships to develop and flourish as the pre-service
teachers engaged in one-to-one tuition for two hours each week over a ten week period. The experiential nature of service-learning facilitated the personal contact between the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students. The pre-service teachers promoted the building of relationships by planning lessons that included strategies that connected with the interests and needs of the Aboriginal students. It was through these strong personal interactions that the pre-service teachers began to change their perceptions of Aboriginal people and their culture. As one pre-service teacher stated:

I think that you can let the stereotypes lead you in ... And that you label the whole lot of people with that ... I think I learnt that you start really, really small and then you build on that ... it doesn’t matter how long it takes ... The tiniest little thing is moving mountains ... (Sarah)

According to Herbert (2012), it is critical that teachers show a willingness to engage with Aboriginal students, and develop attitudes that are open and honest, and consider the point of view of their students. Research that sought the Aboriginal students’ opinions of “good teachers” reported that good teachers “took a personal interest in them outside of their classroom; would have a joke with them; and would listen to students as part of the communication process …” (Herbert, 2012, p. 45). Hence “good teachers” made a concerted effort to create “respectful learning environments that not only earned them the respect of their students, but enabled them to bring out the best in those students” (ibid, p. 45).

The literature reinforces the potential of service-learning to develop the participant’s awareness of social issues. As stated in Cipolle (2010), “Students see the contradictions between what they (and society) say they value and believe in and the injustices they see others experiencing” (p. 42). Indeed, by interacting with people from
different ethnic or racial backgrounds one comes to see people as individuals with their own stories, “rather than as statistics and stereotypes ... to see the world from other perspectives” (Cipolle, 2010, p. 41).

An issue that arose for some pre-service teachers in building a closer relationship with their student was the concern of becoming too much of a friend, rather than being viewed primarily as a tutor teacher. The closeness in age of the Aboriginal students and the pre-service teachers had the potential to confuse professional with personal relationships. Accordingly, the pre-service teachers recognised the need for making explicit the boundaries of the relationship between teacher and student and this was a valuable lesson for many throughout the service-learning experience. Research from the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body [QIECB] (2003) reporting on case studies from several schools also highlighted “the importance of the teacher taking responsibility to establish boundaries around behaviour that is acceptable within the learning environment … ideally establishing boundaries as a collaborative negotiation process …” (cited in Herbert, 2012, p. 49). It was through the direct experience of working face-to-face with the Aboriginal students, that the pre-service teachers gained critical insight into the importance of their role as teachers in setting high standards of professional behaviour that maintained the boundaries between them and their students.

Many of the pre-service teachers also explored different teaching styles to ascertain what was the most effective in working with the Aboriginal students. As the pre-service teachers worked with a peer in delivering the lessons, they were able to observe each other’s teaching styles. Thus they were able to critically reflect on
teaching styles and strategies that did not work as opposed to those that seemed to engage the Aboriginal students.

The pre-service teachers were conscious of maintaining positive respectful relationships without being ‘overbearing’, yet still achieving the goals of the lessons planned. Such sentiments were shared through the reflective journals. The opportunity to discuss and maintain a reflective journal was appreciated by many as an essential component of the service-learning structure. As one pre-service teacher recalled, writing a journal helped her cope with the experiences she was encountering:

It made me so emotional ... I talked about it so much with my mum ... and I found I quite really enjoyed writing a journal ... that really was beneficial to me. Its [Aboriginal education] just such a complex issue ... (Jimi)

It is acknowledged that a key component of experiential learning is the opportunity for deep reflection. As noted by Dewey (1938, cited in Hackett & Lavery, 2012) learning arises when a person “reflects on the significance of an experience that engages him or her”. Such an approach “allows a person within the present [experience] to evaluate what he or she learnt from the past [experience] and plan or make decisions about the future [experience] …” (p. 14). Reflection was a key component of service-learning and the analysis of the pre-service teachers’ weekly reflective journals was an essential and valuable component of the phenomenological study. The value of critical and deep reflection allowed for new insights to emerge from the service-learning experience. As part of IPA methodology, the pre-service teachers’ reflective journals have been read and re-read, coded and re-coded numerous times, to inform the research study. The researcher also used her research journal as a strategy to ensure bracketing and epoche, and the weekly service-learning reflections promoted regular and deep
analysis of bias and subjectivity. The third area of discussion relates to the pre-service teachers’ self-awareness and self efficacy that developed throughout the service-learning experience.

5.2.1.3 Self-awareness and self-efficacy

Bandura’s (2002) social cognitive theory of learning provides a useful framework for interpreting the pre-service teachers’ development of self-awareness and self-efficacy through the service-learning experience. An important component of the social cognitive theory that is expounded by Bandura (1999) in earlier writings is that of the “triadic reciprocal determinism”, proposing that “behaviour, the person and the environment all interact to affect one another” (cited in White, Hayes, Livesey, 2010, p. 238). Indeed, all of the pre-service teachers acknowledged the reciprocal nature of service-learning and how it had impacted on their personal and professional growth. Changes in personality functioning were described by some pre-service teachers as they spoke of greater patience and empathy both within the tutoring session and in life in general. Cognitive and affective learning, the second component of the “triadic reciprocal determinism” were evident in the pre-service teachers as they became more flexible and adaptable in their approach to the lessons, and reflective in evaluating what worked and what needed changing. One pre-service teacher noted that her personal trait of a sense of humour had been important in engaging and managing her Aboriginal student. Thus the behaviour of the pre-service teachers was influenced by the environment, the third component of the “triadic reciprocal determinism”, becoming more confident and comfortable during the service-learning experience.

Self-efficacy refers to “an internal belief of being capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals” (Churchill et.al., 2011, p. 79). The service-
learning experience impacted on the self-efficacy of the pre-service teachers, both positively and negatively. Many of the pre-service teachers expressed self-doubt during the phenomenon in their ability to address the complex needs of the Aboriginal students. Yet others related how they had increased in confidence through the face-to-face teaching over the ten weeks. Some pre-service teachers shared how their lesson planning was more focused than previously. Others expressed growth and development in knowledge related to literacy pedagogy and teaching strategies.

Such contrasting personal beliefs are consistent with social cognitive theory, whereby “self-efficacy is inherently contextual because it produces behaviours that vary across situations and its activation depends on the particular context” (Hayes, Livesey, 2010, p. 239). Consequently, the pre-service teachers’ self-efficacy ebbed and flowed throughout the service-learning experience according to the responses of the Aboriginal students and the achievement of lesson outcomes. Through observations, feedback and reflections, the pre-service teachers came to “view themselves in new and different ways, to appreciate the need to be open to change, to comprehend the changes they themselves [were] going through and how they [were] adapting and growing in relation to their own professional identity” (Herbert, 2012, p. 40). In essence, the service-learning experience allowed the pre-service teachers to further develop their personal sense of identity as a teacher and to enhance their sense of self-efficacy. The impact of the service-learning experience on the pre-service teachers’ awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal people and their culture follows.

5.2.1.4 Awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal people and culture

A key recommendation of the Review of Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-2008 is that the “teacher has a good understanding of the child as an
individual, including the cultural context in which the child has been raised” (Unaipon, 2009, p. 13). The pre-service teachers were eager to learn as much as they could from their Aboriginal students and in doing so increased their own knowledge of Aboriginal culture and commensurate strategies to be used in the weekly teaching sessions. All the pre-service teachers acknowledged that they had a greater respect and appreciation of Aboriginal people and their culture as a result of the service-learning experience. The personal stories of the lives of many of the Aboriginal students really inspired the pre-service teachers to work diligently to assist these students in addressing their needs. Compassion and empathy were traits that came to the forefront of the experience for many of the pre-service teachers as they connected personally with the Aboriginal students.

The University of Technology Sydney has adopted experiential learning as an effective strategy to enhance learning of Aboriginal studies (Evans, 2012). Such an approach demands face-to-face contact of pre-service teachers with Aboriginal people. Consistent with the findings of the current service-learning research study, is that experiential learning has “been significant in helping students [pre-service teachers] make sense of their theoretical/historical studies in the field while … motivated by the school/community site … it provides approximations of their future professional lives” (Evans, 2012, p. 56). Thus it is acknowledged that experiential learning enabled pre-service teachers’ valuable professional opportunities to connect with Aboriginal students before graduating as teachers, better prepared to face the demands of the future.

As stated by Garlett (2012) “teachers who become culturally competent are then more able to effectively teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide an education that creates pathways to independence, employment and life-long success”
The role of the teacher is crucial in improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and it is essential that teachers have an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture, to “bring about the accelerated improvement we are seeking” (ibid, p. v). The service-learning experience of the pre-service teachers at the Aboriginal College had a profound impact on their knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education.

5.2.1.5 Goals and aspirations

As a consequence of the service-learning experience, nine of the twenty four participating pre-service teachers expressed interest in working with Aboriginal students in rural and remote locations. It was apparent through the post-interviews that these pre-service teachers had developed a real passion, love and commitment to Aboriginal people and their culture. In following these participants after the research study, it was found that one pre-service teacher, now qualified, accepted a teaching position in a very remote location in Western Australia. Her post-interview response affirmed her commitment to Aboriginal education. She stated:

It [the service-learning experience] has reinforced my love for these people ... and the Aboriginal culture ... I have a great respect for them ... I love teaching them. (Elisabeth)

A caveat is added to the example of Elizabeth who accepted a teaching position in an Aboriginal school. Given her prior extensive experience with Aboriginal education; it may have been Elizabeth’s intention from the beginning to teach Aboriginal people and her decision not due to the service-learning experience.

Other participants also sought employment as graduate teachers in schools with a high number of Aboriginal students. Such an outcome of the service-learning
experience is congruent with the findings of Cipolle (2010) who recalled that a student in her study changed his career pathway, joining a Peace Corp, as a result of a service-learning experience. Similar views are expressed by Prentice and Robinson (2010) where students became more “career wise” through participation in a service-learning experience (p. 11). Similarly, Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning (1984) can be applied to many areas and fields of training; being particularly relevant in career counselling. Experiential learning forms the basis of observations and reflections for the learner. In turn, these observations and reflections are “assimilated and distilled into a new concept of theory ... from which new actions can be generated” (cited in Atkinson & Murrell, 1988, p. 375). The new ideas created can serve as a guide for the learner in future choices and decisions, and the generating of personal and professional goals. The following section examines in detail the significance of the service-learning experience on the participant Grace who was introduced in the previous chapter.

5.2.1.6 Discussion of the case study of Grace and her student Matt

It is acknowledged in IPA that it is useful at times to “select one typical extract which reflects the core of the participants’ experience ... because they are rich with emotion or metaphor, or elicit empathy or capture the reader’s imagination” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 115). The researcher holds to the belief that the case study of Grace and her student Matt, as outlined in Chapter Four, highlights the impact of the service-learning experience. As such, a detailed discussion of their story follows to emphasise the reciprocal nature of the service-learning methodology. It also connects to the research on service-learning as presented in Chapter Two of the thesis, where benefits to both those providing and receiving the service-learning are explored.
The journey of the pre-service teacher Grace, and the Aboriginal student Matt, was closely observed by the researcher for a number of reasons. First, Grace appeared to be really challenged by Matt during service-learning experience. Second, her comments in the service-learning tutorial discussion and journal reflections alerted the university and school staff to a very difficult and complex learning context for her in working with Matt. Grace, however, was not prepared to give up on the service-learning experience, despite the initial frustrations and challenges. Her persistence, initiative and perseverance ensured a very successful experience for Matt, with Grace acknowledging the reciprocity of learning. The steps that Grace took to address the learning needs of Matt, once she had information about his learning disability, followed closely the four elements of “critical consciousness” described by Cipolle (2010, p. 39).

The first essential component of developing “critical consciousness” that is part of the Social Justice Model of Service-Learning shown in Figure 2.2 of Chapter Two, is that of “Self Awareness” (Cipolle, 2010, p. 11). As a participant in the research study, Grace was interviewed as to why she had chosen to be involved in the service-learning experience. Her responses were accorded with her level of “self awareness” in that she had no contact with Aboriginal people and culture, and limited practical teaching experience. Indeed, Grace was from England and she was keen to “gain a more comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal culture in modern day Australia” (Grace’s Journal entry). Throughout the service-learning experience, Grace frequently had times when she doubted her own ability to help Matt. She had a strong sense of commitment and was aware of her responsibility in tutoring Matt in literacy learning. However, she acknowledged her lack of knowledge and experience in teaching, especially as this related to a teenage student with very low literacy levels. Grace also shared how having high expectations of herself in being able to assist Matt often caused her anxiety and
frustration. She was uncertain that she would be able to help yet strongly believed that what she was doing was very worthwhile and important. These sentiments are congruent with the model of service-learning outlined by Cipolle (2010), where it is stated that “service-learning experiences ... develop a strong sense of self ... that what they [the participants] are doing is important ... and fosters a sense of agency and ... belief that they can affect change” (p. 11).

Grace was also challenged by her own stereotypical view of Aboriginal people. She quickly became aware that Matt did not fit her preconceptions. Indeed, she was taken aback by his polite, well-mannered and considerate nature and acknowledges in her journal:

Whilst I believed I had not adopted society’s stereotypical view of Aboriginals being less than well behaved, I was in fact harbouring some preconceived ideas. I was humbled to see how wrong I was ... I became aware of the marked difference between my apprehensive approaches to engaging with the Aboriginal community compared to their very open acceptance of us ... (Grace)

The second element of the Social Justice Model of Service-Learning (Cipolle, 2010) developed the concept of a greater awareness of others. Grace seemed to move quickly into such a consciousness when she began to work with Matt. Not only was she aware of Matt’s disposition, background and learning needs, her experience within the program appeared to be in contrast to other pre-service teachers who were also working with teenage Aboriginal students. Thus her awareness of others was two-fold: an awareness of the student Matt; and other pre-service teachers in the program. First, Grace developed a strong connection with Matt, learning much about him, his interests, family, community and cultural practices. She was astute in observing Matt and through these observations and other information discovered that Matt had a learning difficulty. Hence the realisation by Grace that she needed to plan her lessons to accommodate his
special needs. Her level of critical consciousness about her student’s background and learning needs certainly appeared to develop in the area of “awareness of others” (Cipolle, 2010, p. 11).

Grace was also acutely aware that her experience with Matt was quite different to that of her peers as they worked with other Aboriginal students. Grace was hesitant to express her emotions during the service-learning tutorial discussions. However she chose to use her reflective journal as an avenue to describe these emotions. Grace came to the realisation that she must develop strategies to cater for the learning needs of Matt. His significant learning disability impacted on his behaviour and achievement. She researched school records, located an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for Matt and discussed his needs with staff of the Aboriginal College. Consequently, she felt empowered to initiate steps within her teaching program specifically catering for the Matt’s learning needs. Grace decided to work alone with Matt to minimise distractions; to give additional time to ‘tune in’ to the lesson concepts; and to undertake a ‘project’ with him based on his interest in cars. Grace negotiated with Matt to build a model car. Through the construction of the car, Grace planned lessons that integrated all the modes of literacy, reading, writing, viewing, speaking and listening. She aimed to develop Matt’s skills in these areas as he worked on the project building the model car.

However, it was through Grace’s conscious effort to build a relationship with Matt that much was achieved in the learning outcomes for Matt, both academically and socially. Grace was very careful and thoughtful in her approach toward Matt and respected his input into his own learning. As stated in her journal:

Talking with Matt about his learning needs was essential, I felt. I believed he appreciated having his opinion respected and this led to him trying really hard to maintain focus
throughout the session ... subconsciously I believe I was showing cultural respect to his need to be maturely responsible for his actions … At the end of the session when I offered my personal commendation for how hard he had worked and stayed on task, he gave a triumphant drum roll on the desk. (Grace)

The study of Grace and her student Matt, seems to concur with the model of service-learning framed by Cipolle (2010) where there is a raised consciousness of the ‘awareness of others’ through the service-learning experience but also a heightened ‘awareness of self’. In many ways, the Cipolle (2010) model could be re-structured to depict the reciprocal nature of the learning as shown in the case of Grace and Matt. The more Grace built her knowledge and understanding of Matt and his learning needs, the more she learned about herself as a teacher and a person. She acknowledged that it was the forging of a positive, respectful relationship that underpinned the success of the service-learning experience for both her and Matt:

“It [Relationships] served as a vehicle for enabling our two cultures to work well together. Society as a whole would do well to foster improved relationships with the Aboriginal community to work at changing some of the inaccurate but ingrained stereotypical views which currently exist”. (Grace)

In analysing the journal statement above, it became evident that Grace’s level of critical consciousness had possibly moved to the next stage in the Cipolle Social Justice Model of Service-Learning: “awareness of social issues” (2010, p. 40). As described by Cipolle, “As they [the participants] reflect on the injustices they see around them and the contradictions between societal beliefs and principles and lived experience, they realise the world is bigger and more complex than they thought … they question the government’s role in protecting and ensuring basic human rights for all” (p. 55). As Grace reflected on the experience and the support she needed to give Matt in his
learning and behaviour, she was critical of the negative and deficit views of many in society towards Aboriginal people. She was determined that her actions would enable Matt to be “proud of what he has achieved ... that will have made all my efforts worthwhile” (Grace’s journal). She was of the view that it was crucial that Matt saw himself as a successful learner if he was to achieve to his potential.

In the post interview session with Grace, she summarised the impact of the service-learning experience in the phrase “I think I loved the experience ... I think I would want to continue the experience ...” (Grace). It is interesting that following the service-learning experience, Grace maintained her connection with Matt at the Aboriginal College and undertook the role of tutoring Aboriginal students as a staff member for over nine months. Such action was congruent with the Cipolle Social Justice Model of Service-Learning, in the final stage of ‘critical consciousness’, being that of “ethic of service/change agent” (2010, p. 11). Those who engage with an “ethic of service/change agent” typically become advocates for those whose cannot advocate for themselves. The service-learning experience significantly influenced Grace and she became passionate about her work at the Aboriginal College. Grace frequently shared how much she was learning about herself and the Aboriginal culture through the ongoing relationship that she had with the Aboriginal students in the tutoring program.

In following the case study of Grace and her student Matt, it became evident that both participants gained a great deal from the service-learning program. The journal entries of Grace frequently made reference to the reciprocal nature of the learning experiences. She commented on how worthwhile the learning was and the strength of the relationship that she built with Matt. She stated, “I thought the reflections were probably the best part of it” (Grace’s interview). Such a statement supports the service-
learning component of structured opportunities for reflection and demonstrates the impact of the experience on the personal and professional development of Grace.

In closely documenting the case study of Grace and her student Matt, the researcher was again challenged by the need to *bracket* and *epoche* potential bias, subjectivity and pre-suppositions as to the service-learning experience that was unfolding. The research of Bednall (2006) re-enforced the constant need for “designs and procedures for the operation of *epoche* and *bracketing* (p. 125). Thus the use of field notes and the research journal were valuable tools to help identify “the potential of bias, how to suspend that bias at the commencement of the data collection and then use an explicit process to evaluate the significance of that bias in data interpretation” (p. 127). Of particular importance for the researcher was the need to *bracket* assumptions about Grace and her ability to manage the service-learning challenges. The researcher was aware of Grace’s previous teaching experiences and that she was a mature-aged pre-service teacher. The researcher needed to use the research journal to make a conscious effort to observe and reflect on Grace’s performance without making judgements based on prior knowledge of this student.

To summarise, a detailed analysis and discussion of the experience of Grace and Matt has demonstrated the reciprocity of the service-learning. In exploring the Cipolle *Social Justice Model of Service-Learning*, there is evidence that each of the aspects of ‘critical consciousness’ described in the model has been a significant part of the experience for Grace in working with Matt. She developed a “deeper self-awareness; awareness of others; awareness of social issues; and ethic of service/change agent” (Cipolle, 2010, p. 40). Yet the experience was not linear, as depicted in the model, but a cyclic, interactive model of learning and reciprocity for Grace. However, the value of
the service-learning experience in terms of personal and professional development for Grace was significant and inspired her to become an advocate for Aboriginal people, as she continued to work to help improve the learning of the students at the Aboriginal College.

5.2.1.7 Conclusion

The purpose of the first section of this chapter was to address Research question one, namely, how does participation in a service-learning experience impact on the pre-service-teachers’ personal and professional development? Six areas of discussion have been presented, that encapsulate the key findings of the research from analysis of the data using an IPA methodology. These include the pre-service teachers:

- Change of perceptions;
- Building of positive relationships;
- Self-awareness and confidence;
- Awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal people and culture; and,
- Goals and aspirations.

A case study of the Aboriginal student, Matt and the pre-service teacher, Grace was discussed for it provided a deeper insight into the impact of the service-learning experience. Discussion of the case study followed the Social Justice Model of Service-Learning framed by Cipolle (2010) and Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning (1984, cited in Atkinson & Murrell, 1988). As such, the linking of the theoretical model of service-learning with the actual experiences of those in the field reinforced the influence of service-learning on the personal and professional development of the pre-service teachers. The service-learning experience challenged many of the pre-service-teachers
to become advocates for Aboriginal people. In the words of Cipolle (2010) service-learning experience enables one “to see possibilities of change and decide to live with integrity and work for social justice” (p. 56).

The focus of the second research question was on the development of the pre-service teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal culture. Hence the question was framed:

5.2.2 Research Question Two:

*How does pre-service teachers’ knowledge of Aboriginal culture develop through exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting?*

In addressing the second research question, pre-service teachers demonstrated increased knowledge of Aboriginal culture in four main areas: cultural practices; Aboriginal languages; family and community life; and, Aboriginal goals and aspirations. Each of these areas is discussed below.

5.2.2.1 Cultural practices

As expounded in the literature review, much research has been done in the area of Aboriginal education. *The what works* program (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) has many components and examples of educational practices that have been successful in engaging Aboriginal communities in achieving improved outcomes for students. The underlying philosophical stance of these programs is summarised in the statement from the *Review of Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-2008*, that improving educational outcomes “invariably demands the teacher has a good understanding of the child as an individual, including the cultural context in which the child has been raised” (Unaipon, 2009, p. 13). The structure of the service-learning experience enabled
the pre-service teachers to build their understanding of the Aboriginal students as they engaged every week for two hours in a one-to-one tutoring session. The focus of these sessions was to produce a “My Story” project, based on information shared by the Aboriginal student. The concept of the “My Story” project was initiated by the Literacy Coordinator at the Aboriginal College after consultation with the Aboriginal students as to what they might like to do during the tutoring sessions. In essence, the Literacy Coordinator was acting as an intermediary in the service-learning model of delivery. As a consequence, the Aboriginal students related many stories of their home and community life. It was through these regular conversations that the pre-service teachers gained a deeper insight into some of the Aboriginal cultural practices. Many of these cultural practices were then recorded in the “My Story” projects and retold by the pre-service teachers in journal reflections.

The strategy of engaging the Aboriginal students in a conversation about their life and interests was very successful in creating many different “My Story” projects. These projects were shared during a “Gallery Walk” with other staff and students from the Aboriginal College. All participants reflected on how much they had learned about the Aboriginal culture through the experience. Similar findings were documented in Harrison (2012) where it was reported a school was successful in improving the learning outcomes of the Aboriginal students by incorporating Aboriginal parents and elders in all aspects of the curriculum. These elders were scheduled into the learning program to “tell stories about their place and history” (p. 13). Thus the students learnt through the stories and context of Aboriginal identity and connection to country, developing their own self-concept and racial identity.

Overseas research in Kickett-Tucker and Coffin (2011) emphasised how essential it is for students to have a positive self-identity and racial identity. It is
purported that “where a school has actively promoted positive identity and culture, there is a much greater shift in the emotional and social well-being of all students but particularly that of first nation or Indigenous students” (ibid, p. 163). The service-learning experience of working with the pre-service teachers enabled the students to share their identities as Aboriginal people and for a project to be developed that respected and valued who they were and where they came from. At the same time, the pre-service teachers gained significant insight into the lives of the Aboriginal students and a deeper respect, recognition and appreciation of the Aboriginal culture. As stated in the *National graduate standards for teaching*, graduate teachers must be able to “demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, culture and languages” (AITSL, 2011, p. 9). The service-learning experience enabled the pre-service teachers to further develop their competence in the area outlined in this graduate standard.

The pre-service teachers increased their knowledge of some of the traditional cultural practices that engaged the Aboriginal students when they returned to their communities. Some students enjoyed hunting and fishing. They also caught, cooked and ate turtle, kangaroo, stingrays, fish and other wild animals. The Aboriginal students described vividly how they performed these tasks and the pleasure they gained from these traditional practices. Many of the pre-service teachers were intrigued by the lives of Aboriginal students when living in the communities and expressed a desire to learn much more about such activities. One pre-service teacher was embarrassed by her lack of knowledge of Aboriginal practices, as her student began to talk about his need to return to his community to participate in the “lore”. She was ignorant of such practices and felt uncomfortable in discussing these with her student. However, she did research these traditional practices for future knowledge and integrated concepts relevant into the
next week’s lessons. The student drafted and published a letter from the point of view of an Aboriginal elder, giving advice to young people about the future. The letter formed an important part of his “My Story” project. Again the students’ self-identities were enhanced through the many cultural practices shared and the pre-service teachers acknowledged a growing respect and interest in Aboriginal people as the service-learning experience continued.

Cultural practices relating to “eye contact” and the term “shame” came to the attention of the pre-service teachers very early in the service-learning experience. According to Harrison (2012), many Aboriginal students are reluctant to try new tasks as they do not want to be singled out from their peers, or paid additional attention. The concept of “shame can dominate how many Aboriginal children think, talk and behave in the classroom” (Harrison, 2012, p. 53). Such a disposition needs to be understood by the classroom teacher as it may mean that Aboriginal students are shy, reluctant to take risks, contribute to discussions, or ask and answer questions. As a result, Aboriginal students can be left behind as their way of communicating is different to traditional classroom practices. Aboriginal students usually focus on “who they have to talk to, what they are expected to talk about, who is watching and what might cause them embarrassment if they say the wrong thing” (Harrison, 2012, p. 53). Teachers tended to focus on what students do and how well they speak. Hence there can be a mismatch between what the teacher expects and what Aboriginal students are happy to contribute. Some pre-service teachers were ignorant of the concepts of “shame” and “eye contact”, whilst others with previous experience of Aboriginal people explained the importance of these practices to their peers. It was essential that the pre-service teachers learnt of these cultural practices as the students’ reluctance to make eye contact and to participate publicly impacted on the tutoring lessons. The development of the pre-service teachers’
knowledge and understanding of these traditional practices ensured a greater understanding and empathy for the Aboriginal students.

The service-learning experience also provided an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to develop their knowledge and understanding of the importance of the different gender roles and responsibilities within the Aboriginal culture. During one tutoring session it was necessary for the female students to move to another learning space as they were uncomfortable in the presence of the male students. The staff at the Aboriginal College explained the different gender roles and responsibilities of the Aboriginal students. Consequently, future tutoring sessions ensured that male and female students worked in separate localities to minimise the distraction and embarrassment that some Aboriginal students displayed. It was acknowledged that gender differences were real and results from an “interaction between genetics and the environment” (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013, p. 121). Traditional Aboriginal practices clearly articulate “Men’s Business, Women’s Business [that] is about ... specific definitions and functions” (Bell, 1998, p. 14). Schools and teachers need to appreciate the significance and importance of these cultural practices and make the appropriate adjustments in the learning program to cater for such diversity.

5.2.2.2 Aboriginal languages

The NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs Standing Committee (2013) states that “Language goes to the very core of one’s identity and Aboriginal languages contain embedded in them, much of the culture, social values and world view of its speakers” (home page, para. 15). Recent research emphasises the need for Aboriginal people to retain and speak their traditional languages (Kickett-Tucker & Coffin, 2011). Many
teachers are not aware or do not recognise the home languages of Aboriginal students and as a consequence the adjustments needed by Aboriginal students to manage in a classroom setting are huge. As stated in Harrison (2012), “A climate of acceptance of Aboriginal English and its speakers is crucial to the success of Aboriginal students” (p. 118). The service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College provided an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to learn firsthand that the use of Aboriginal languages was still important for many of these Aboriginal students. Indeed some of the Aboriginal students were from very remote communities of Western Australia and spoke four or five traditional languages. The use of traditional languages was an ‘eye-opener’ for the pre-service teachers as they listened to the conversations of the Aboriginal students using their home languages. Other students used Aboriginal English, as they created their “My Story” project. As one pre-service teacher recorded in her journal:

For the first time I brought my student’s home language, Ngaanyatjarra into the session. I did this as an experiment to see whether contrasting the two languages would hinder or enhance his learning of English. In doing so, I found that the student’s engagement and understanding grew more than I could have expected. By presenting the two languages together and helping him identify the differences and similarities I found that the student instantaneously had developed confidence with using the English language. He was excited to show me the differences between the two languages, specifically he emphasised the difference between the syntactical structures. I was very impressed with my student today as I can see he is very intelligent, but sometimes that intelligence is masked by his limited ability to communicate in English … (Kate)

Graduate teachers are expected to be able to “demonstrate a broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, culture identity and linguistic background on the education of students ...” (AITSL, 2011, p. 9). Again, the experiential learning of
engaging face-to-face with an Aboriginal student in an educational context enabled the pre-service teachers to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal culture and languages. In the Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2013, it is stated that “the ability to speak words and phrases in Indigenous language is a source of strength, resilience and pride. Connections to languages and culture are also fundamental to Indigenous health and well being” (Australian Government, 2013, p. 45).

Teachers need to understand how important it is for Aboriginal students to maintain their home language and provide increasing opportunities to develop and strengthen their language skills and connections to culture. According to Troy (2012), language programs in schools can engage previously disengaged students and change the culture of the school. It is stated that “The increase in self esteem and interest that students develop in education when they engage in programs in and about their own languages is measurable” (Troy, 2012, p. 135). For the pre-service teachers, being immersed in both Aboriginal English and traditional dialects deepened their awareness and appreciation of the Aboriginal culture and its languages.

5.2.2.3 Family connections

Many of the pre-service teachers acknowledged that they had a greater understanding and appreciation of the importance of family and community for Aboriginal people through the service-learning experience. As part of the “My Story” project, the Aboriginal students shared stories of their families and communities. Some students also drew visual images of their family connections. Such diagrams helped the pre-service teachers understand the relationship between family members and the
various terminologies used for different family members, for example cousin brother, aunty, grannies to name a few. Indeed acknowledgement of the importance and connectivity of members in a family is essential if schools are to establish positive and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal families and communities. As stated by Kickett-Tucker and Coffin (2011), “a family and kinship system provides unconditional acceptance, security and care” (p. 167). It was through the many regular conversations between the pre-service teachers and Aboriginal students that cultural knowledge and awareness of family connections and practices increased for both participants. As stated in one pre-service teacher’s journal:

But I think definitely knowing their culture and their relationship with their family … And how important it is to them … Because I think most of them all seem to have that real bond … regardless of where they came from … (Kate)

Pre-service teachers need to provide a “culturally responsive curriculum” (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth & Peter, 2012, p. 49). It is only by knowing and appreciating the richness and diversity of the Aboriginal culture, that teachers can develop classroom practices that address the needs of Aboriginal students. “Schools need to work in unison with local Aboriginal communities to ensure culturally secure materials and culturally appropriate teaching strategies are developed, maintained and monitored; otherwise schools will continue to fail Aboriginal kids” (Kickett-Tucker & Coffin, 2011, p. 163). It is important to note that the Australian Curriculum has outlined three key cross-curriculum priorities, with one of these being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture. The focus of this priority is for all young Australians to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, their significance for Australia and the impact these have had and continue to have on the world (ACARA, 2013b). The learning that
occurred for the pre-service teachers through the service-learning experience of working directly with an Aboriginal student was a starting point in developing a greater understanding and appreciation of the Aboriginal culture thus increasing their cultural competence.

5.2.2.4 Goals and aspirations

Through the service-learning experience, many of the pre-service teachers reflected on how similar the Aboriginal students were to themselves. The Aboriginal students and pre-service teachers both shared goals and aspirations to achieve high educational outcomes that would enable them to gain employment and support a family. Some Aboriginal students commented that their families at home in the communities were proud of their educational achievements and wanted them to continue in their schooling. Similarly, many of the girls shared the excitement of social practices often associated with western society that included “going shopping” and “preparing for the School Ball”. Such experiences highlighted the common interests of the students and similarities in culture. It also challenged the views of some participants as these goals and aspirations were contrary to some of the stereotypical representations of Aboriginal people and their culture in society.

Research on the effect of a stereotype threat “demonstrates that intellectual performance, rather than being a fixed and constant quality, is quite fragile and can vary greatly depending on the social and interpersonal context of learning” (Howard, 2010, p. 31). Furthermore, three important factors were identified as impacting on the motivation and performance of students: “their feelings of belonging, their trust in the people around them, and their belief that teachers value their intellectual competence”
The building of a trusting and caring relationship between the teacher and student was viewed as having a significant influence on student achievement. A significant outcome of the service-learning research study was that the pre-service teachers changed their perceptions of Aboriginal people because they connected face-to-face. For some pre-service teachers it was a ‘life-changing’ experience and would impact on how they engaged with Aboriginal students in the classroom and in society.

5.2.2.5 Conclusion

It was recognised by Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth and Peter (2012) that improvement in the educational outcomes for Indigenous students can be achieved through strategies that focus on “transforming teaching practices and school culture such that they include and respond to Indigenous students’ cultural experiences and values” (ibid, p. 49). Thus it is essential that teachers develop an awareness of the culture of their students to enable them to understand and plan appropriate classroom learning opportunities. The service-learning experience of the pre-service teachers working with a student in an Aboriginal educational context promoted an increased knowledge of the Aboriginal culture. Knowledge was gained by the pre-service teachers in the key areas of traditional cultural practices, including Aboriginal languages, family connections, and gender roles and responsibilities. Also important was the development of the pre-service teachers’ appreciation and respect for Aboriginal people and their culture. As stated by one participant:

I think respect for the Aboriginal people … I just learnt a lot about their culture … just liked the particular student that I worked with … she was from up north … The Aboriginal culture as a whole … I think just the respect for them … and it was really good seeing everyone else respecting them. (Sarah)
The service-learning experience also enabled the pre-service teachers to develop competency in addressing the National professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2011) and to support the teaching of the Australian Curriculum cross curriculum Priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture (ACARA, 2013b). It is stated that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority “provides opportunities for all learners to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the world’s oldest continuous living culture” (ibid, p. 1). Such knowledge and understanding will promote greater awareness, knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and build positive participation in Australian society.

5.2.3 Research Question Three:

What do pre-service teachers learn about literacy pedagogy as it applies to an Aboriginal context?

The purpose of the service-learning experience was to assist Aboriginal students develop their literacy skills whilst facilitating pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. It was anticipated that the pre-service teachers would also have the opportunity to practise and refine their literacy pedagogical and instructional skills through planning and implementing weekly lessons. The journal entries of the pre-service teachers attest to the literacy knowledge and skills learnt and practised throughout the ten weeks of teaching:

I had personally loved the fact that once we had established the model making project … That the amount of literacy that I was able to see in that, I might not otherwise have seen straight away … When you started to look into it and ask “what is the literacy?” … You could see so much … It was a real project … There was so much natural literacy in there … (Grace)
Diagnostic testing ... the importance of diagnostic testing in literacy is massive and I think also integrating the different types of literacy. (Nelly)

I guess the planning of literacy was quite important ... trying to find activities that they liked ... So my own literacy ... make sure you understand what you are doing with the kids before ... so that you can see the difference. (Linda)

In analysing the reflections and post-interviews of the pre-service teachers relative to their knowledge, skills and understanding of literacy teaching, six key areas were identified: literacy competence; pedagogy of literacy teaching and learning; assessment and Individual Education Plans; curriculum content; instructional strategies; and, integration of literacy. Each of these areas is outlined and relevant literature discussed. The first area relates to the importance of literacy competence.

5.2.3.1 Importance of being literate

One of the most significant lessons for many of the participants was the reality of the low literacy levels of the Aboriginal students, as stated in a reflective journal:

I couldn’t believe my eyes seeing two teenage boys sitting in front of me struggling and slowly reading their way through their paragraphs ... No expression, or punctuation was shown and then it hit me that these students (Indigenous or not) have every right to be taught and shown the correct way to read ... there is so much we take for granted ... (Clare)

Other pre-service teachers shared how they were saddened to see their Aboriginal student reluctant to engage with tasks, being embarrassed by their limited literacy abilities. Thus the importance of being literate was reinforced for many of the pre-service teachers as they began the service-learning experience. As stated as a central objective of the National partnership agreement on literacy and numeracy is the need to
raise the “overall attainment so that all Australian students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society” (COAG, 2009c, p. 3). The service-learning experience of the pre-service teachers enabled them to experience firsthand the challenges that these Aboriginal students faced as a consequence of their limited literacy skills. Some pre-service teachers questioned their own capacity or self-efficacy, to address the students’ needs within such a short time-frame, yet were excited to participate and committed to trying everything possible to make a difference for their student. At times the pre-service teachers expressed frustrations as they struggled to find ways to engage the teenage students in learning tasks that were both age appropriate, and at a suitable literacy level. As the weeks passed, the pre-service teachers described how they were growing in knowledge, skills and confidence in teaching literacy through lessons that focused on the interests and needs of the Aboriginal students. These lessons in turn assisted in building a positive relationship with the Aboriginal students that respected their ability and cultural backgrounds. The pre-service teachers’ pedagogical knowledge of literacy teaching and learning was the second area that was influenced by the service-learning experience.

5.2.3.2 Pedagogy of literacy teaching and learning

The impact of the service-learning experience on the pedagogical knowledge of one pre-service teacher was highlighted in his journal entry:

I have found a new appreciation for planning and time management to try and get the most out of each session. If planning is not thorough enough the objectives of the session get lost and no real learning occurs. At the same time the boys [his students] need to be challenged and given time to complete the task which has been a fine balance ... (Cade)
Others expressed the view that the planning needed to be clear and explicit, incorporating the student’s home language. These sentiments concur with the research from Harrison (2012) where it is stated that “the incorporation of Aboriginal English in the school curriculum could redress the unequal power relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and act as the foundation on which to build Aboriginal students’ literacy skills in Standard English” (p. 121). The Aboriginal students were keen to talk together in their home language, before engaging with Standard Australian English in the planned lesson. As stated in the *Australian Curriculum: English*, that by “giving students the opportunity to develop the skills of doing linguist work (e.g. collecting, describing, and recording language) while learning Aboriginal languages … will also increase their understanding of the nature of all languages” (ACARA, 2013a, p. 17). Language and culture are intertwined and students need to be able to converse in their first language to support the learning of a second language (Emmitt, Zbaracki, Komersaroff & Pollock, 2010). The child’s personal identity, self-esteem and place in the community are defined by the first language. “The language, along with the cultural concepts and perspectives it reflects, must be respected at school for the child to feel respected and positive about learning” (Buckskin, 2012, p. 171). Thus the opportunity to engage with the Aboriginal students who conversed in their home language enabled the pre-service teachers to develop strategies that also incorporated the teaching of Standard Australian English.

Flexibility in the delivery of curriculum was recognised by many of the pre-service teachers. The one-to-one tutoring sessions enabled immediate feedback from the Aboriginal students to the pre-service teachers, and thus adjustments needed to be made if the lesson was not going well. For many of the participants, thinking ‘on their feet’ proved challenging; however, it did facilitate the development of a range of
instructional strategies. One pre-service teacher changed her position from sitting opposite her student to sitting side by side. Such a simple strategy had a marked effect on the engagement of her student throughout the lesson. Another pre-service teacher described how she introduced “short burst of tasks” to help maintain the student’s focus. The opportunity to “Plan, Do and Review” was stated by one pre-service teacher as invaluable in her journey to develop her knowledge and skills as a literacy teacher.

A concept frequently articulated in much of the literature on Aboriginal education emphasises the need for teachers to have high expectations of Aboriginal students: Stepping up: What works in pre-service teacher education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009c); Dare to lead (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009a) and What works for Indigenous students’ programs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009d). Pre-service teachers also expressed the need for high expectations of the Aboriginal students as essential in the teaching of literacy. Sarra (2011), argues that low teacher expectations has held Aboriginal students back in the classroom however, “if the teacher believes the child will learn, then the child will learn” (ibid, p.107). High expectations will produce improved results for Aboriginal students (Harrison, 2012, p. 68). The pre-service teachers were keen to do everything possible to enable their Aboriginal students to performance to their highest potential. Many pre-service teachers also expressed delight at how willing and keen the Aboriginal students were about learning and improving their literacy skills. Together the pre-service teachers and Aboriginal students worked diligently, to ensure the “My Story” project was completed, within a limited time-frame and presented with pride at the “Gallery Walk”. Thus the highly contextualised learning experience provided a very successful avenue for student engagement and academic improvement.
The pre-service teachers’ awareness of environmental and social factors influencing the learning outcomes was important in their development as teachers. It enabled them to link theoretical concepts such as “social constructivism” to classroom practices (Bandura, 2002). The understanding of how important “creating learning environments in which learners are cognitively active in the process of constructing and internalizing valid ideas is an essential role for teachers” (White, Frawley & Anh, 2013, p. 190). If the learning environment is not appropriate for the students, the teacher must be proactive in making changes. Hence the need to develop an environment conducive to learning was acknowledged and enacted by some pre-service teachers when challenging experiences arose whilst working with their students. Consequently, some pre-service teachers chose to re-locate their teaching sessions to minimise distractions for the students and to maintain a positive learning environment. Important too, was the need to acknowledge the different needs of the male and female students, and to allow choice in the location of the teaching space. The service-learning experience provided a real life context for the pre-service teachers’ growth and development of educational theory and classroom teaching pedagogy, enhancing their sense of identity as teachers and self-efficacy.

5.2.3.3 Assessment and Individualised / Personalised learning plans

It was acknowledged by many pre-service teachers that the literacy lessons needed to address the deficits in the knowledge and skills of the Aboriginal students. At least twelve pre-service teachers used the terminology “diagnostic assessment” when describing the starting point for effective literacy teaching. Specific assessment tools were used to gain knowledge of the students’ strengths and weaknesses, examples being the use of reading running records, and standardised assessment spelling and reading.
age tests. The teaching of basic literacy concepts, such as phonological awareness, phonics, and reading strategies of decoding, chunking and chaining were viewed as essential in addressing the literacy skills of the Aboriginal students. It is important to note the significance of the focused assessment of one pre-service teacher whilst working with her Aboriginal student. She observed carefully his responses to lesson tasks and noted some inconsistencies. After further investigation she began to doubt the student’s hearing ability. Further health testing confirmed a hearing disability. Such a diagnosis enabled the student to gain extra support and to have curriculum adjustments to address his learning needs. The pre-service teacher was pleased that her diligence in observations and assessment had made a real difference to the student and his learning opportunities.

The opportunity for authentic learning was appreciated by the pre-service teachers as they used the diagnostic assessment tasks completed to develop Individual Education Plans (IEP). The IEPs were implemented and evaluated as to the success of the content and strategies planned. Such knowledge and experience was invaluable for the pre-service teachers as the development of an IEP and Personalised Learning Plans (PLP) are mandated for use in schools with Aboriginal students (Education Policy and Research Division Office for Education Policy and Innovation, 2007). As described in the literature review of Chapter Two, the key beliefs underpinning the concept of the PLP is that a difference can be made to each Aboriginal student’s achievement when a plan is made that targets the student’s level of achievement, respects his/her cultural identity, incorporates sound teaching practices, and seeks consistent participation by the student. The PLP process acknowledges the need to respect the background of the family, and their role as the “first educators of the students” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009e, p. 3).
The model articulated in the document *What works. The work program* entitled *
Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools* (National Curriculum Services, 2012) also encouraged staff to use “focused teaching, assessment data and explicit teaching … and to make the work learning content challenging, accessible, engaging and culturally responsive” (p. 8). The service-learning experience thus enabled the pre-service teachers to demonstrate sound understanding of assessment pedagogy consistent with current research and education policies.

5.2.3.4 Curriculum Content

The pre-service teachers expressed the belief that the curriculum content of the service-learning experience needed to be developmentally appropriate, motivating, engaging, purposeful and meaningful. Thus it was essential that Aboriginal students were given the opportunity to share their interests and to have input into learning experiences relevant to them. As one pre-service teacher expounded, her Aboriginal student was keen to apply to a mining company for work so she helped him complete a job application. She was able to incorporate the teaching of specific literacy strategies into the lessons as he worked on his own personal application. According to educational psychologists Eggen and Kauchak (2013) “Personalization is a valuable motivation strategy … as it promotes student interest in the learning activities … is meaningful … connects new information to structures already in long-term memory … and students feel a sense of autonomy …” (p. 378). Indeed the personal approach adopted by the pre-service teachers was a very motivating and effective tool in engaging the Aboriginal students in the learning program.
Students’ access to computer technology and a wide range of media were also viewed as strategies to engage the Aboriginal students and to personalise the curriculum content. Indeed the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the classroom is clearly articulated in the *Australian curriculums: General capabilities* (ACARA, 2013b). All teachers are required to embed the use of ICT into the learning program to enable students to develop competencies necessary to be successful in modern society. Donovan (2007) suggests that the pedagogy of ICT and that of Aboriginal educational pedagogy are very compatible. He discusses Aboriginal pedagogical principles in terms of “learning through experiencing concepts, peer or group learning, space for own investigation, adaption to local context and community” (p. 123). ICT pedagogy is described as “learning through experience, allows for group space, investigation in their own time … can be contextualized … can be flexible and adapted to specific outcomes” (Donovan, 2007, cited in Radoll, 2012, p. 123). The strong correlation between the pedagogy of Aboriginal education and ICT pedagogy enables teachers to use ICT as a teaching tool that engages Aboriginal students and supports their learning and achievement of essential academic skills.

Curriculum content was also delivered through the direct instructional program MULTI-LIT (Making up for Lost Time in Literacy) developed by Macquarie University (2012). It was also used to build the basic literacy knowledge of some Aboriginal students. Pre-service teachers involved in teaching through the MULTI-LIT program reflected on the usage of such a program and strategy. For some, they felt that the routine delivery of the program, the step-by-step progression of concepts and the tracking of student achievement were positive components of the program. However, others found it challenging to engage the students in the program as the content had limited relevance to the students.
Many of the pre-service teachers engaged the Aboriginal students using topics generated by the students that frequently connected to their families, language, cultural practices and community life. Such an approach was consistent with the concept of using “culturally responsive curriculum”, a term used in much of the current research. “Culturally responsive curriculum” was defined by Hall (2009) as “authentic, child-centred and connected to the child’s real life. It employs materials from the child’s culture and history to illustrate principles and concepts” (Slide 17). Such an approach empowers students “intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Hall, 2009, Slide 6). As stated by one pre-service teacher:

I have noticed how much the history of some famous Aboriginals really interested the students, and I feel as though I could use this to benefit the boys. (Julie)

The development of the “My Story” project enabled the pre-service teachers to respond to the interests of the Aboriginal students and developed a “culturally responsive curriculum” that was very successful in engaging the students in meaningful and purposeful learning. As stated “when students are presented with examples and experiences that directly relate to their lives … their interest and sense of belonging can significantly increase” (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013, p. 379). Thus the application of learning theory to classroom practices was reinforced for the pre-service teachers as they evaluated the learning content and strategies implemented. The reflective journal maintained by the pre-service teachers provided a valuable tool to record the success and limitations of the lesson content and strategies employed.
5.2.3.5 Instructional strategies

The fifth area of learning for the pre-service teachers related to strategies effective for instruction in literacy. Many of the participants were confident in describing the strategies that they incorporated into their lessons, using such terms as modelling, explicit teaching, and decoding, encoding and integrated instruction. Field notes made by the researcher frequently described the focused learning that could be observed as the weekly lessons occurred. A wide range of instructional strategies were implemented, with many pre-service teachers following the “Gradual Release of Responsibility Model of Learning” (Wild, 2009, p. 11). Research by Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) also emphasises the importance of modelling as a strategy to promote “self-efficacy and self-regulation in reading and writing” with students. Self-efficacy and self-regulation are seen as “critical influences on reading and writing achievement” (p. 7). The service-learning experience enabled the pre-service teachers to explore opportunities to apply models of learning that were studied at university as part of the teaching degree. Each week the pre-service teachers completed a learning log of lesson plans and reflections. These clearly showed the depth of knowledge, understanding and skills that the pre-service teachers incorporated into their literacy lessons:

It needs to be explicit … Even though you know they’re that age you can’t expect them to get something straight away without you actually kind of explicitly teach them … they need to be taught it … It’s that explicit teaching of strategies … We were focusing a lot on reading strategies … and comprehension strategies that needed to be repeated and applied in different ways … And not just on one type of text … And get them to view videos … They enjoyed engaging with technology … And using the computer and changing the text modes … to suit what they were interested in yet still trying to accomplish the literacy that we were trying to do … (Cade)
Whilst employing many different instructional strategies, the pre-service teachers continually reflected on the need to build positive relationships with their students. Specific learning tasks were planned by the pre-service teachers to build the rapport with the Aboriginal students.

I think about building a relationship with the students, the first thing … If you don’t do that then they can’t go on … to get them engaged in the learning … I think that is the most important thing … (Elena)

Throughout the service-learning experience the pre-service teachers were continually evaluating and reflecting on their teaching practices, pedagogy of literacy teaching and the socio-cultural learning. In many ways, the pre-service teachers were displaying the attributes of “critically reflective practitioners” described by Larrivee (2008) as “teachers who … focus their attention both inwardly at their own practice and outwardly at the social conditions in which these practices are situated” (cited in Churchill, et al., 2011, p. 453). It is advocated that teachers who are “critically reflective” can better meet the needs of their students as they “offer new insights that will improve … work and … relationships with … students” (Churchill, et al., 2011, p. 453). Such insights may relate to one’s own bias, stereotypes or presuppositions about students. A deepening awareness of these aspects “helps teachers take informed actions, develop a rationale for practices, avoid overreactions to negative experiences, stay emotionally grounded, enliven the classroom and increase democratic trust” (Churchill, et al., 2011, p. 45). The service-learning experience promoted structured critical reflection, thus supporting the pre-service teachers in becoming “critically reflective practitioners”.
5.2.3.6 Integration of learning

It is recognised in *Teaching Reading: Report and recommendations* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005) that “an integrated approach requires that teachers have a thorough understanding of a range of effective strategies, as well as knowing when and why to apply them” (p. 14). Further recommendations affirm the need for literacy instruction to be the responsibility of all teachers across all curriculum areas. Such an approach must recognise the diverse backgrounds of the individual students and address their interests and needs. The service-learning experience of the pre-service teachers in working with the Aboriginal students highlighted the benefits of integrated learning programs. Together the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students negotiated the learning project termed “My Story”. A wide variety of learning experiences were undertaken that connected directly to the interests of the Aboriginal students; for example, a model car was constructed; a magazine was designed and published; a video clip was made to teach football skills; a mining application was completed; a university entrance application written; and books of students’ home communities were written and published. Through these projects, the pre-service teachers addressed the literacy needs and skills of the Aboriginal students. It was recognised how valuable these projects were in engaging the students in meaningful literacy learning.

Literacy learning … Seeing it in practice … natural literacy in practice was really, really good … and beneficial … because you talk about it in the classroom but to actually do it … makes it so real to me … I will always remember that and I will refer to it … (Grace)

As stated previously, the use of computer technology was also a very useful and engaging tool for the Aboriginal students to use in the learning programs. The *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2013b) recognises the need for all students to become
competent in the use of Information and Computer Technologies (ICT). It acknowledges the value of ICT in transforming the learning environment of students, empowering them to think, and take control of their own knowledge and skills. The pre-service teachers also found that the Aboriginal students quickly engaged with the technologies available and were developing effective communication skills. It was often through the integration of technology that the pre-service teachers could explicitly teach the literacy concepts needed. To summarise, the integration of learning through highly contextualised experiences was successful in addressing the literacy knowledge and skills of the Aboriginal students, whilst engaging them in meaningful and relevant learning opportunities.

5.2.3.7 Conclusion

The focus of Research question three was on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, skills and understanding of literacy pedagogy as it applied to an Aboriginal context. In analysing the data collected from the pre-service teachers relative to their literacy learning, six key concepts were identified. These included: the importance of being literate; pedagogy of literacy teaching and learning; assessment; instructional strategies; curriculum content; and the integration of literacy learning. The service-learning experience enabled the pre-service teachers to consolidate their pedagogy of literacy teaching. It also provided a context for reflection and reciprocity for the both Aboriginal students and pre-service teachers as they too, developed their literacy skills. The journal entry of Grace as she reflected on working with her student Matt, encapsulates much of the depth of learning for her and other pre-service teachers throughout the service-learning experience.
5.2.4  Research Question Four:

What do the educational providers perceive as the benefits of the pre-service teachers’ input?

Research question four aimed to elicit information from the staff at the educational setting as to the benefits of the pre-service teachers’ input working with the Aboriginal students. Thus four staff members from the Aboriginal College were interviewed to gain their perceptions of the impact of the service-learning program. Each of these staff members was integral to the administration and organisation of the service-learning experience. The findings from each of these interviews are discussed.

5.2.4.1  Principal Interview

As stated in the Review of Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-2008, “the development of genuine partnerships, based … on cross-cultural respect between the school and the Indigenous community, remain the primary platform to productive, stimulating and responsive … schools, servicing Indigenous students” (Unaipon, 2009, p. 21). The Principal of the Aboriginal College expressed the same sentiments about the value of the partnership of the University pre-service teachers and staff, with the students and staff in his college. He believed that the opportunity for the pre-service teachers to work one-to-one with the Aboriginal students was “gold”, enabling all concerned to benefit culturally and academically from the experience. The structured service-learning program provided a common focus and strategic plan that aimed to improve the educational outcomes of the Aboriginal students, and enhanced the pedagogical skills of the pre-service teachers.
Through the experience, the Principal commented that he had observed a genuine interest from the pre-service teachers to connect and learn about the Aboriginal students. As a result, the Aboriginal students were keen and eager to participate in the program, and he was excited by the high standard of the presentation of the ‘My Story’ projects. In essence, the service-learning experience facilitated the development of the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education whilst ensuring reciprocity for all concerned. As noted in Herbert (2012), the key to effective inclusion of Indigenous students demands partnerships between universities and schools based on strategies that are “the outcome of genuine engagement between all stakeholder groups, including communities” (Herbert, 2012, p. 40).

The Principal noted increased confidence in the pre-service teachers during the service-learning experience, with frequent positive and supportive comments heard during the tutoring sessions. He believed that the skills developed by the pre-service teachers throughout the program would be transferable to future teaching contexts. In his opinion, all schools needed to develop partnerships with tertiary institutions, to maximise the learning outcomes for both institutions. Such a view is consistent with the statement, “National and international research strongly supports the inherent benefits of schools and education systems working closely with Indigenous communities” (Unaipon, 2009, p. 21). The Principal acknowledged that the service-learning program had gone from “strength to strength” and that such a partnership between the Aboriginal college and University needed to be valued, supported and maintained. He expressed the view that “building the craft of teaching” was important for all teachers, and the service-learning partnership between the Aboriginal College and the University was a sound platform to achieve such a goal.
Given that the Australian Government has now endorsed the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011) the opportunity for educators across different schools, organisations and associations to engage in discourse to clarify these standards is essential. Graduate teachers need to be able to demonstrate “broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds” (AITSL, 2011, p. 9). The service-learning experience at the Aboriginal College enabled the pre-service teachers to develop competency in addressing such a standard, and the other standards outlined in Table 2.

### 5.2.4.2 Literacy Coordinator

The Literacy Coordinator was a member of the Aboriginal College staff and played a key role in the organisation and structure of the service-learning program. He worked closely with the University staff to develop the aims and purpose of the program, and was responsible for the implementation of the program at the College. He also managed the whole school literacy program, which included the literacy class timetabling, data collection, assessment and evaluation. Hence he had an intimate knowledge of the Aboriginal students, their needs, abilities and interests. He selected the students to participate in the service-learning experience and advised the pre-service teachers on academic, cultural and social aspects of the service-learning program.

The Literacy Coordinator was very positive about the service-learning program on both the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students. He believed it was highly beneficial for the pre-service teachers because it provided an opportunity for them to
“effectively engage and teach Indigenous students”. It also enabled the pre-service teachers to apply the skills and strategies learnt at University in a meaningful context. He was well aware that many of the pre-service teachers had very limited experience with Aboriginal people and believed it was an important opportunity that would assist them in future teaching situations.

The benefits for the Aboriginal students from the pre-service teachers’ input were also expounded. He shared specific examples of Aboriginal students whose literacy skills showed marked improvement during the service-learning experience. One example was of a student who had a reading age of below 10 years, but was now “on track to graduate”. Other students showed a notable change in disposition and attitude to learning, as a response to the pre-service teachers’ input. They were now enthusiastic and eager to work hard and be a part of the program. He attributed much of this change to the personal relationships that had been built between the Aboriginal students and the pre-service teachers. He believed that the Aboriginal students appreciated having a “teacher who truly cared for them” and who came every week just to “be there for them”. He was also confident that “a culturally appropriate curriculum” helped to engage the students and that the presentation day or “Gallery Walk” had proved very successful, with many school staff genuinely interested in the work of the Aboriginal students. The staff interest in the service-learning experience was a ‘by product’ of the program, and a source of professional development for some teachers.

In concluding the interview, the Literacy Coordinator, stated that the program had been “fantastic … that there is a level of support for the kids … and that it is ongoing …”. He was of the view that the success of working with Aboriginal students was dependent on “personal relationships … that is the biggest key …”. The service-
learning program had promoted the building of meaningful, engaging and respectful relationships and thus it was “highly beneficial from both perspectives … pre-service teachers and Aboriginal students”. Thus the principle of reciprocity that is at the heart of the service-learning experience was truly validated by the comments and discussion of the Literacy Coordinator from the Aboriginal College. He also believed that the opportunity for *Closing the Gap* as stated in the *Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2013* (Australian Government) was a significant outcome of the service-learning experience.

5.2.4.3 Teacher Assistant

The semi-structured interview with the Aboriginal college Teacher Assistant enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the service-learning experience from the educational providers’ viewpoint. The Teacher Assistant expressed the opinion that the experience had been very beneficial to both the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students. She had noted the enthusiasm and willingness of the pre-service teachers to engage with the Aboriginal students with a genuine interest in learning more about them, and teaching strategies to support the learning.

For the Aboriginal students, the service-learning experience had enabled them to interact with a non-Indigenous person, something that they may have had little experience in doing. Thus the opportunity facilitated the coming together of two cultures and the chance to learn about each other. The Teacher Assistant described a number of examples where she noted changes in attitude of the Aboriginal students as they began to work with the pre-service teachers. They were keen, eager and excited about the pre-service teachers’ lessons. Data shared from the MULTI-LIT program
Macquarie University, 2012), a direct instructional program, showed a marked improvement in the reading results of many of the Aboriginal students in the program. Of the twenty-five students in the MULTI-LIT program, fifteen had increased in their reading age throughout the ten weeks of working with the pre-service teachers. These increases in reading ages ranged from one month to five years for one student. Such a result was celebrated as this student now showed a reading age of 12 years of age, in contrast to the seven years of age at the start of the program.

The Teacher Assistant conducted an informal survey with the Aboriginal students at the conclusion of the service-learning experience to ascertain their opinions of the program. All of the twenty-one students surveyed believed that the program had helped them improve their reading and writing skills and they would like to join the program again if it was available. The Aboriginal students also indicated that they were proud of the work they had achieved with their tutors. In being asked what they did not like about the program, one student shared that there was “shame” in the presentation speech, and that working in the library near male students was uncomfortable for her. The survey provided a valuable perspective of the impact of the pre-service teachers’ input from the point of view of the Aboriginal students.

In concluding the interview, the Teacher Assistant shared that it was essential to show Aboriginal students that teachers “cared about the individual … were open to asking their opinions … about their culture and were respectful to them”. She closed by expressing the view that the service-learning experience had been “fantastic” and beneficial to everyone concerned. Again the reciprocity of the service-learning experience was validated by those involved in the program.
5.2.4.4 Adjunct staff: School Chaplain

In the words of the School Chaplain, the service-learning experience was a “multi-multi bonus … because it is a two way thing”. He felt the benefits were clearly visible in the relationship that was evident between the Aboriginal students and the pre-service teachers. It was “magic” to see the young people working together, and to observe the growth in confidence and self-esteem of both parties. He also shared that some of the female Aboriginal students were taking a greater pride in their own appearance due to the influence of the female pre-service teachers. As the program continued, the communication between the Aboriginal students and pre-service teachers seemed to strengthen, both non-verbally and verbally. It was his belief that there was a “new generation of Aboriginal Leaders” emerging and the service-learning experience was helping to develop the confidence and skills of these young people. He concluded by stating that “first and foremost the teacher needed to build a relationship with the student that was genuine, caring, and conveyed a belief in the Aboriginal students ability to learn and achieve”.

5.2.4.5 School Librarian

It is important to note the feedback of the School Librarian as to the effect of the service-program. In the words recorded in a pre-service teacher’s journal:

When I was getting a laptop off the library teacher she asked me which student I had and I told her. She told me how she had noticed an improvement in his attitude and literacy in the past few weeks. This put a huge smile on my face and I really hope that I am contributing to this success. (Julie)

The observations of the School Librarian reinforced the incidental changes in the student’s learning outcomes, some of which may be attributed to the service-learning experience and influence of working face-to-face with the pre-service teachers.
5.3 Conclusion

In addressing Research Question Four as to the impact of the pre-service teachers’ input, the responses of the five staff members from the Aboriginal College are all very positive and enthusiastic about the service-learning experience. The Aboriginal students’ academic results, survey responses and project outcomes were evidence of the significance and success of the phenomenon. The common thread that underpinned the success of the service-learning program lay in the “relationship-based pedagogy” advocated by Bishop et al. (2012). Furthermore, emphasis was on “the importance of transforming teaching practices and school culture such that they include and respond to Indigenous students’ cultural experiences and values” (p. 49). A range of strategies were outlined that included “... infusing cultural content into classrooms, strengthening teacher and student relationships by enabling culturally responsive classroom pedagogies, and making schools more affirming of Indigenous cultures through community engagement efforts” (Bishop et al., 2012, p. 49). It is noted that much of the research presented by Bishop et.al (2012) is based on studies conducted in New Zealand.

The service-learning experiences of the pre-service teachers working with the Aboriginal students in an educational context attested to similar strategies for successful engagement and academic outcomes. In essence, the pre-service teachers responded to the needs of the Aboriginal students by planning and implementing a culturally responsive curriculum, built on sound relationships and pedagogy of literacy teaching and learning. Reflection was explicit and embedded in the program, supporting the development of the pre-service teachers as critically reflective practitioners. The reciprocity of the service-learning experience was acknowledged, recognised and valued by all participants in the phenomenon.
5.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter Five has discussed the findings of the research into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. The four research questions have framed the discussion with current literature interwoven and informing the outcomes of the research study. Research question one elicited the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development throughout the experience. Five key areas of learning were discussed: changes in perceptions; building of positive relationships; self-awareness and self-efficacy; awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal people and culture; and, goals and aspirations.

Research question two focused on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge of Aboriginal culture. The pre-service teachers demonstrated increased knowledge of Aboriginal culture in four main areas: cultural practices; Aboriginal languages; family and community life; and, Aboriginal goals and aspirations.

In addressing Research question three, six key concepts were identified. These included: the importance of being literate; pedagogy of literacy teaching and learning; assessment; instructional strategies; curriculum content; and the integration of literacy learning.

The final research question sought to elicit the perspectives of the educational providers as to the impact of the pre-service teachers working with the Aboriginal students. The success of the Aboriginal College partnership with the University was acknowledged with positive and significant learning for all participants.
Chapter Six presents the conclusions and recommendations of the research study into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. The chapter concludes with a personal impact statement.
6.0 Introduction

The philosophical assumption underpinning the qualitative research into service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, was that of social constructivism. Using the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, phenomenology was the chosen methodology through which the researcher sought to find the common “essential characteristics” of the service-learning experience. Four research questions were used to guide the research study:

1. How does participation in a service-learning experience impact on the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional development?
2. How does pre-service teachers’ knowledge of Aboriginal culture develop through exposure to an Aboriginal educational setting?
3. What do pre-service teachers learn about literacy pedagogy as it applies to an Aboriginal context?
4. What do the educational providers perceive as the benefits of the pre-service teachers’ input?

Twenty four early childhood and primary pre-service teachers participated in the phenomenological study, sharing the experience through pre and post-semi-structured interviews. The participants also maintained weekly reflective journals recording their perceptions, knowledge and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education throughout the ten week service-learning experience. Field notes and interviews with the educational
providers at the Aboriginal College also added to the data collected. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to find the essence of the phenomenon. A diagrammatical representation of the concluding insights is shown in Figure 6.1, and provides the framework for the conclusions and recommendations.

**SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

As shown in Figure 6.1 there are seven main categories identified as the key outcomes of the service-learning experience. Each of these categories is discussed and provides the framework for the concluding insights of the study.

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*Figure 6.1 Diagrammatic representation of concluding insight*

Service-learning provides the context for the seven categories identified. The unifying concept at the heart of the service-learning experience is the building of relationships. These equally contributing elements are discussed in what follows as a means of concluding the study.

### 6.1 Concluding Insights

As shown in Figure 6.1 there are seven main categories identified as the key outcomes of the service-learning experience. Each of these categories is discussed and provides the framework for the concluding insights of the study.
6.1.1 Australian Education Policies

The Council of Australian Governments has committed to “halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018)” (Australian Government, 2013, p. 1). The Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2013 acknowledges that much has been achieved since the policies of the Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-2008 (MCEETY, 2006). However, the need to support Aboriginal students across the six target areas is still a high priority in government investment and policy. A key strategy to improve the educational outcomes for all Australians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous has been the focus on improving teacher quality. The National professional standards for teachers reflect and build on national and international evidence “that a teacher’s effectiveness has a powerful impact on students, with broad consensus that teacher quality is the single most important in-school factor influencing student achievement” (AITSL, 2011, p. 1). Thus, these professional standards have been developed as a key educational reform to improve teacher quality and describe the explicit knowledge, skills and attributes that teachers must demonstrate upon graduation and beyond.

Service-learning has been explored as a methodology and pedagogy for developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, hence facilitating achievement of the National professional standards for teachers; specifically Standard 1.4 and Standard 2.4 (AITSL, 2011). A key recommendation of the Executive Summary of National professional standards for teachers: Standards 1.4 and 2.4 Improving Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is that “programs that have been found to be effective be scaled up and trialled across the national education community in order to broaden and deepen the research base in Indigenous Education and improve the skills and confidence of teachers.
to implement such programs” (MaRhea, Anderson & Atkinson, 2012, p. 8). The research study has concluded that service-learning has been highly successful in developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education and should be promoted as an effective methodology in pre-service teacher training as a way of developing competence in addressing Standards 1.4 and 2.4 of the National professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2011).

The question was posed by Herbert (2012), “If pre-service teacher education programs do not deliberately build in opportunities for participants to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities, how can teachers authentically meet the outcomes of the national, state and territory Indigenous education policies?” (p. 54). The research study found that all pre-service teacher participants acknowledged that the opportunity to teach Aboriginal students face-to-face enabled them as future teachers to develop pedagogical literacy skills, knowledge of Aboriginal education and increased their cultural awareness and competence.

The study has provided an in-depth account of the phenomenological research on the impact of service-learning on the pre-service teachers’ personal, professional, cultural awareness and pedagogical knowledge of Aboriginal education. Evidence of the significance of the service-learning experience is repeatedly shown through the data analysis. For pre-service teachers who had previously had no experience with Aboriginal people, the face-to-face opportunity to work together was described as profound, life-changing and inspiring. In the words of one pre-service teacher:

Being a part of Aboriginal education and having a small hand in their development as an individual, however small, and assisting them with their learning journey is an experience
like no other. Witnessing Aboriginal education first hand with such a broad diversity of students has given me such a different outlook, one that I am very grateful for. I feel that this experience has opened my eyes and helped me broaden myself and creating, hopefully, a more holistic well-rounded teacher. (Cade)

6.1.2 Socio-cultural cognitive learning theory

Conclusions drawn from the phenomenological research study of service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education are congruent with the socio-cultural theory of cognitive development. As shown in Figure 6.2, the emphasis of the socio-cultural theory of development is on the “influences of social interactions and language, embedded within a cultural context, on cognitive development” (Eggan & Kauchak, 2013, p. 45).

![Figure 6.2 Socio cultural theory of development is a theory of cognitive development that emphasises the influence of social interactions and language, embedded within a cultural context, on cognitive development.](image)

The pre-service teachers’ development of knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education occurred as a result of the service-learning experience. Through the social interaction with the Aboriginal students, the pre-service teachers grew in knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture, the pedagogy of
literacy learning and were influenced both personally and professionally. The self-efficacy of the pre-service teachers as being competent in the craft of teaching increased throughout the phenomenological experience. As such, it is concluded that service-learning is a methodology and pedagogy that enabled the pre-service teachers to enhance their professional and personal development, from a socio-cultural cognitive theoretical perspective.

Service-learning was effective in promoting a positive self-belief in the pre-service teachers as effective teachers thus increasing their self-efficacy. McInerney and McInerney (2002) state “The perception that one has been successful at an activity raises efficacy beliefs and therefore raises expectations that future performances will also be successful” (p. 151). A teacher’s identity is viewed as an “amalgamation of personal and professional knowledge and of lived teaching experiences” (Churchill et al., 2011, p. 239). Consequently, it is propounded that the pre-service teachers will benefit from their increased sense of efficacy and identity as an effective teacher of Aboriginal students in future teaching opportunities or experiences. Such findings are consistent with the research study of Ashton and Webb (1986) where it was noted that teachers with higher self-efficacy were likely to “have a positive classroom environment, support students’ ideas, and address students’ needs”. Furthermore, “teacher self-efficacy was a significant predictor of student achievement” (Ashton & Webb, 1986, cited in Schunk, 2009, p. 113). The research of Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons (1992) also emphasises the effect of self-efficacy on one’s knowledge, skills, motivation and commitment to fulfilling challenges. Hence service-learning enabled the pre-service teachers to develop their self-efficacy and competence as beginning teachers that is likely to impact on the future achievement of students with whom they work.
6.1.3 Pedagogy of literacy teaching

The service-learning experience of working with Aboriginal students in an educational context enabled the pre-service teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and pedagogy of literacy teaching. As stated by Hattie (2009), “the act of teaching requires deliberate interventions to ensure that there is cognitive change in the student …” (p. 23). Such was the experience for the pre-service teachers throughout the service-learning study. Each week the pre-service teachers planned, implemented, assessed and evaluated the literacy lessons they taught. Many pre-service teachers acknowledged the importance of diagnostic assessment of basic literacy concepts, linguistic structures and learning strategies. The authentic context of teaching the Aboriginal students provided an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to apply theoretical knowledge of literacy pedagogy and to refine their skills and practices.

The theory of literacy acquisition as a social practice was reinforced through the service-learning experience. Social practice is defined as “an explanation of the influences of social and cultural literacy practices on literacy acquisition” (McLachlan, Nicholson, Fielding-Barnsley, Mercer & Ohi, 2013, p. 29). Three key aspects of the theory of literacy as a social practice is that, first, “literacy is deeply influenced by context”; second, “literacy is a part of the construction of self”; and, third, “literacy affects participation in communities” (p. 30). Each of these aspects was reinforced for the pre-service teachers as they reflected on literacy teaching and learning with the Aboriginal students. The context dictated the learning objectives, strategies and content of the lessons; the self-identity of the Aboriginal students was pivotal in building of successful literacy outcomes; and, the limited literacy skills of the Aboriginal students reinforced for the pre-service teachers, the opportunities that would be denied them within modern societies. The service-learning experience enabled the pre-service
teachers to consolidate their knowledge of literacy pedagogy and practices, reinforcing the complex nature of literacy acquisition and the need to address the diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the Aboriginal students.

6.1.4 Instructional strategies

The service-learning experience enabled the pre-service teachers to develop instructional strategies to address the learning needs of the Aboriginal students as they worked together to complete the “My Story” project. Pre-service teachers were able to describe and justify the learning strategies implemented, such as the “gradual release of responsibility model” (Annandale, et al., 2009b, p. 30). Through the “gradual release of responsibility model” of learning, the teacher scaffolds the student’s learning by moving through instructional procedures of modelled, shared, guided and independent learning. Other cognitive strategies such as summarising, questioning, clarifying, and predicting were frequently articulated in the reflective journals and learning logs of the pre-service teachers as they documented the lessons throughout the ten week phenomenology.

Hattie (2009) noted that “the explicit teaching of cognitive strategies and deliberative practice with content when using these strategies makes a major difference” (p. 204). In line with Hattie’s insight, it is concluded that service-learning in an educational context enabled the pre-service teachers to consolidate learning theories and to have the opportunity to implement instructional strategies in a meaningful and authentic context.

Another important instructional strategy that was successful in engaging the Aboriginal students in literacy learning was the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). As articulated by Winch, Ross, March, Ljungdahl and Holiday (2011) “ICT is a powerful tool in the classroom because it can ignite the
imagination and bridge the global divide ...” (p. 400). In addressing the National professional standards for teachers (2011), it is expected that pre-service teachers will be able to “implement teaching strategies for using ICT to expand curriculum learning opportunities for students” (AITSL, p. 11). Again in the Australian curriculum: General Capabilities, students are to develop skills in using ICT for tasks associated with information access and management, information creation and presentation, problem solving, decision making, communication, and creative expression (ACARA, 2013). It is clear from the present study that the service-learning experience enabled the pre-service teachers to explore the use of ICT as a tool for enhancing the engagement and learning of the Aboriginal students. Pre-service teachers were also able to develop their own competence in integrating ICT into the curriculum, hence achieving the Graduate standard 2.6 (AITSL, p. 11).

In essence, the service-learning phenomena enabled the pre-service teachers to develop their “instructional self-efficacy” as described by Schunk (2009), as “personal beliefs about one’s capabilities to help students learn” (p. 113). The teachers’ self-efficacy is as important as the students’ according to social cognitive theory, because “teachers’ self-efficacy can affect what they do prior to, during, and after instruction” (Schunk, 2009, p. 126). Therefore, it was concluded that the pre-service teachers were able to enhance their instructional self-efficacy through the service-learning phenomena and that this would be beneficial to their development as beginning teachers.

6.1.5 Cultural awareness and competence

In the executive summary, Learning the lessons? Pre-service teacher preparation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, it is stated that there is a
“separation and imbalance between Indigenous content and transfer of effective teaching skills in pre-service teacher education” (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 1). It concludes that the focus of the curricula is on the “transfer of knowledge and understanding, rather than skills” (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 1). Recommendations are made that stress the importance of knowledge and awareness being matched with skills. The paper calls for a new pedagogy within teacher education to address these perceived deficits. It also seeks to identify “best practice pedagogical and community engagement models” to direct future initiatives in professional learning and pre-service teacher education (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 2).

It is propounded that the research into service-learning as a methodology and pedagogy for developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education provides a model of “best practice pedagogical and community engagement …” (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 2). The structure of the service-learning experience enabled the pre-service teachers to build their understanding of the Aboriginal students as they engaged for ten weeks in a two hour one-to-one tutoring session. A one hour tutorial facilitated by University staff followed that enabled the pre-service teachers to engage in discussion, reflection and critical thinking of the experience. It also provided an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to enhance their literacy pedagogy and instructional skills. For the pre-service teachers, being immersed in both Aboriginal English and traditional dialects deepened their awareness and appreciation of the Aboriginal culture and its languages. Also important was the development of the pre-service teachers’ appreciation and respect for Aboriginal people and their culture whilst increasing their cultural competence in addressing the students’ needs. As stated by Martin (2008), the emphasis for re-conceptualising Aboriginal schooling must see a “shift away from ‘teaching to’ to ‘teaching with’ Aboriginal
students” (p. 6). The research study has provided evidence that service-learning makes a difference to all who participate. As such, it is reasonable that pre-service teacher education includes a service-learning model of learning and pedagogy to enable an increased level of cultural competence and professional learning for pre-service teachers.

6.1.6 Attitudinal changes

Insights into the experience of the pre-service teachers working in an Aboriginal educational context are consistent with much of the literature on the outcomes of service-learning. As stated by Cipolle (2010) “new perspectives and understandings compel students to question the previously held notions and beliefs about others and critique what they have been taught as truth” (p. 54). Many of the pre-service teachers acknowledged that their stereotypical perceptions of Aboriginal people were challenged by the reality of working with the Aboriginal students. Indeed, the relationships that they developed with the Aboriginal students made them critically reflect on past prejudices and racial discrimination. The initial emotions and fears of some of the pre-service teachers were dispelled almost immediately once personal contact and interaction occurred with the Aboriginal students.

Evidence has been presented throughout the present research study showing the changes in perceptions, attitudes and understandings of the pre-service teachers towards Aboriginal people as a result of the service-learning experience. The case study of the Aboriginal student, Matt and pre-service teacher, Grace was carefully documented as it showed the significance of the experience for both participants. Grace had never had contact with an Aboriginal person, and acknowledged the many stereotypical assumptions she held about Aboriginal people and their culture. By working with Matt,
one-to-one, she overcame many challenges and changed her attitude and perceptions of Aboriginal people. She became an advocate for Aboriginal people, returning to the educational setting after the service-learning experience, to continue her work with other Aboriginal students.

Central to the change of attitude and perceptions of the pre-service teachers was the development of relationships with the Aboriginal students. Each week the pre-service teachers planned explicit strategies to build a positive, respectful and trusting relationship with the Aboriginal students. In the tutorial session, the pre-service teachers discussed the strategies implemented and reflected on the lessons taken. Many pre-service teachers shared that successful lessons resulted from a conscious effort to include the interests, cultural context and needs of the students.

Service-learning provided a powerful means of personal and professional development for the pre-service teachers. As stated by Herbert (2012), “such attitudinal change … will become the catalyst for them [pre-service teachers] to enhance their own capacity for delivering education that empowers Indigenous students to get what they want from their education” (p. 41). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that service-learning is an effective methodology and pedagogy in teacher education for ensuring that “teachers develop critical insight into the importance of their role in the education of Indigenous students and accept responsibility in setting high standards for academic outcomes of all students, including Indigenous students” (Herbert, 2012, p. 49). If pre-service teachers can increase their capacity to engage with Indigenous students with an attitude that is “open, honest and accepting of cross-cultural engagement”, then it is likely that they will make a difference and, as Herbert (2012) states, “finally deliver on
the promise of education for this nation’s first peoples: equality for all Australians” (Herbert, 2012, p. 49).

### 6.1.7 Aboriginal education

In the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011) Standard 2.4, there is the expectation of teachers that they will promote an understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The goal of the standard is the promotion of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Also important is Standard 1.4 of the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011) that has a focus on strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The executive summary *Learning the lessons? Pre-service teacher preparation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students* poses the question: “If pre-service teacher education programs do not deliberately ‘in-build’ opportunities for participants to work with Aboriginal students or communities, how can those programs meet the outcomes of national and/or state/territory Indigenous policies?” (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 10). The present study has shown that service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness is an effective and authentic way of responding to such a question.

The evidence presented in the current study demonstrates that a service-learning approach can be highly successful in helping pre-service teachers achieve the relevant aspects of the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011). Through the service-learning experience, the pre-service teachers acknowledged that they had a deeper appreciation, knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people. They were also able to identify key instructional strategies, also found in the literature, for
engaging students and addressing their literacy learning needs. These included the integration of a “culturally responsive curriculum” (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth & Peter, 2012, p. 49); development of personalised learning plans (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012c); the use of “two way learning” (Purdie, Milgate & Bell, 2011); and the importance of teachers maintaining high expectations of Aboriginal students (Sarra, Matthews, Ewing & Cooper, 2011).

Most significant to the learning of the pre-service teachers was the building of relationships with the Aboriginal students. It was through the face-to-face experience of working together that the pre-service teachers came to appreciate how similar they were in interests, family connections, goals and aspirations, and enjoyment of daily living. The reciprocity of the service-learning experience was evident in the respectful and trusting relationships that were observed by the researcher throughout the time of the phenomenological-based study.

It is acknowledged that “In light of the fresh impetus being given to the provision of Indigenous education by the professional standards for teachers, more research, tailored to support the standards, must be commissioned and undertaken as a matter of urgency” (Moreton-Robinson, 2011, p. 16). The current research on the impact of service-learning on pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education is presented as one such research study. Evidence has been documented through pre and post-interviews, journal reflections and field notes as to the effect of the service-learning experience on the pre-service teachers. As stated by one participant:

It’s amazing the changes you can see across one term with one-on-one teaching, it’s phenomenal ... I was working in the hall at most times and watching the other students the way
that the relationship changed and the way the quality of work changed just from week to week, in that hour and a half. One-on-one is just invaluable. For students who had issues with attendance to be looking forward to coming to school, it’s just fantastic … (Nelly)

6.1.8 Building positive, respectful relationships

Central to the service-learning experience as shown in Figure 7, was the development of positive, respectful and trusting relationships between the pre-service teachers and the Aboriginal students. On numerous occasions the pre-service teachers stated that the building of relationships was at the heart of the teaching experience. The pre-service teachers explicitly planned strategies and learning tasks to promote the development of these relationships. Some of these strategies concur with those documented by Sarra (2011) as traits of the best teachers as described by Aboriginal students, namely, having a genuine interest in individual students; making learning fun; making time out of class; being passionate about what was being taught; and, asking about the students’ interests (ibid, p.114). Other attributes of the best teachers described by students and recorded in the work Hattie (2009) were those who “built a relationship with students, ... helped students to have different and better strategies or processes to learn the subject ... and who demonstrated a willingness to explain material and help students with their work” (p. 108). Through the service-learning experience the pre-service teachers appear to have been able to enact many of these traits, creating quality learning opportunities for the Aboriginal students that supported the achievement of important educational outcomes.

The centrality of the building of relationships as evidenced through the study is highly consistent with a growing body of research emphasising that “... no matter what
changes in education the future holds, the establishment and maintenance of high-quality positive relationships is perhaps one of the most crucial must have capacities in the make-up of the twenty-first century teacher” (Churchill et.al., 2011, p. 561). As reported by Bishop (2009), the greatest influence on the educational achievement of students was the relationships between the teachers and students. Hattie (2009) also stressed the importance of teachers developing interpersonal relationships with students as being essential to quality teaching and achievement of educational outcomes. As concluded by Churchill et al., (2011) “The quality of the teacher and of the teaching, are the key factors in determining the level and quality of student learning” (2011, p. 560).

Concluding comments by Hattie (2009) encapsulate the essence of quality teachers, “It is teachers using particular teaching methods, teachers with high expectations for all students, and teachers who have created positive student-teacher relationships that are more likely to have the above average effects on student achievements” (p. 126). The service-learning experience enabled the pre-service teachers to recognise how important the development of positive, respectful teacher-student relationship was and to implement strategies to promote such relationships. As stated by one pre-service teacher in her reflective journal:

There is no other unit like this where the most important aspect is relationships ... As the trust and relationship developed so too did their [the Aboriginal student’s] work, effort and results. (Grace)

### 6.1.9 Service-learning Methodology and Pedagogy

Service-learning is both a methodology and pedagogy of learning that should be considered relevant and pertinent to higher education generally and in particular, pre-service teacher education. Service-learning can facilitate the development of
partnerships between university teacher education and school experiential learning placements, providing reciprocity of learning for all participants.

The present research study has presented evidence that service-learning seems to have contributed to improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal people and helped better prepare undergraduate teachers to meet the demands of the teaching profession in the 21st century. In reflecting on the four research questions addressed throughout the study, the emphasis was on the impact of service-learning on the pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education. It has been shown through triangulation of the data collected throughout the phenomenological experience, and using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis that the service-learning experience significantly influenced the pre-service teachers’ personal and professional knowledge, skills and understanding of Aboriginal education. The pre-service teachers’ cultural awareness and perceptions were enhanced by the face-to-face experiences with the Aboriginal students. Stereotypical assumptions of Aboriginal people were challenged by the pre-service teachers; indeed, many of the pre-service teachers took the stance of advocacy for Aboriginal people as an outcome of the service-learning experience. The change in attitude and perception of Aboriginal people and culture by the pre-service teachers was contrasted markedly with their negativity prior to participating in the study.

Pre-service teachers’ self-efficacy in literacy pedagogy and practices were enhanced by the service-learning experience. Cognitive and theoretical knowledge essential to literacy instruction was consolidated for the pre-service teachers as their “instructional efficacy” increased. The benefits of the service-learning experience to the Aboriginal students were numerous and long lasting. Pre-service teachers returned to
the Aboriginal College after the completion of the study and continued to work with the students in the learning programs. Aboriginal students involved in the service-learning opportunity sought ways of maintaining participation in future programs. An ongoing partnership was established between both institutions, with the essential elements of the service-learning methodology and pedagogy used to frame the program structure.

At the heart of the service-learning experience were the relationships that were formed by all concerned. Through the critical components of service-learning; experiential education, reciprocity and reflection, the pre-service teachers acknowledged the impact of such an experience. The depth and breadth of learning for many of the pre-service teachers is mirrored in the final journal entry of one participant:

I have developed so much as a teacher through effective planning, time management, building rapport, catering for students’ needs and listening to the unspoken language that tells the greatest story.

I will no longer go into a class and allow for an individual to be left behind. I will ensure that I do everything that I can to create a learning environment that all students can engage with and be part of. I have also personally grown in the process too. My values have changed and I have become much more accustom to change and new experiences. I feel more “rounded”, more “whole”. It is hard to put into words what we have achieved. It is incredible.

It is extremely humbling to know that what we have done has had an influence on these individuals and that what we have shown/taught/given them they will be able to use in their future. Finally what I have learned along this journey I will be able to take into mine. (Elena)
6.2 Recommendations

In analysing the key outcomes of service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Aboriginal education, and on the basis of the preceding discussion, the following seven recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that a service-learning experience in an Aboriginal educational context be incorporated into pre-service teachers’ courses to develop achievement of the National professional standards for teachers Standard 1.4: Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, culture identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds; and Standard 2.4: Understanding of and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (AITSL, 2011, p. 11).

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that University teacher education courses in literacy and language teaching incorporate service-learning as a methodology and pedagogy for developing pre-service teachers’ competence in achieving the National professional standards for teachers Standard 2.5: Know and understand literacy ... teaching strategies and their application in teaching areas (AITSL, 2011, p. 11). Pre-service teacher’s self-efficacy can be strengthened through service-learning experiences that enhance pedagogical and instructional strategies related to literacy acquisition.
**Recommendation 3:**

It is recommended that partnerships be established between universities and schools to enable sustained and ongoing opportunities for service-learning units of study beneficial to both institutions. The implementation of service-learning partnerships between those in higher education will require “strong leadership, financial support and evidence of outcome” (Langworthy, n.d., p. 126).

**Recommendation 4:**

It is recommended that all University staff and students in teacher education undertake cultural awareness training to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The principles of service-learning could be incorporated into the cultural awareness training to facilitate the building of respectful, trusting relationships between those participating, and provide a means by which staff and pre-service teachers are better prepared to address the educational needs of Aboriginal students. Such a recommendation is part of The University of Notre Dame Australia Strategic Plan 2013-2016: Implementing practices and strategies that will promote the ideal of Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community (2013, Strategic Goal 3).

**Recommendation 5:**

The inclusion of service-learning as a methodology and pedagogy be recognised by Universities as a core and valid approach to higher education. University academics could be trained in the principles of service-learning for the delivery of content knowledge, cognitive outcomes, instructional skills, and reflective learning and teaching practices.
Recommendation 6:

As critical reflection is an important strategy for teacher development and growth, it is recommended that teacher education courses of study employ and expand upon the use of reflective teaching practices to strengthen critical reflection and learning of pre-service teachers. The maintaining of a journal provides a rich and authentic form of personal and professional reflection that promotes the development of the reflective teacher.

Recommendation 7:

It is recommended that further research be undertaken using mixed methods that may strengthen the evidence base of the effect of service-learning on the cultural competence, literacy pedagogy and instructional strategies of pre-service teachers. A larger cohort of participants across Universities, and through a longitudinal study should be conducted to enable a greater cross-section of responses and outcomes.

6.3 Conclusion

“Quality teacher education is absolutely essential to the social and economic security of Australia” (Garlett, 2012, p. v). If the rhetoric of Closing the Gap for Indigenous Australians is to be a reality of 21st century Indigenous education, significant changes ought to be considered in the way education addresses the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is widely recognised that teachers play a crucial role in the relationships they develop with their students (Hattie, 2009; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Price, 2012). Positive, trusting and respectful relationships between students and teachers are essential to the educational achievements of all students. Pre-service teachers must be “culturally competent”, and
be able to demonstrate the *National professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011). The phenomenological research study into service-learning has shown to be an effective pedagogy and methodology for developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and understanding of Aboriginal education. As stated by Butin (2010) “Service-learning has shown to enhance, among other things, students’ personal efficacy and moral development, social responsibility and civic engagement, academic learning, transfer of knowledge and critical thinking skills” (p. 8). These qualities of the service-learning experience are perhaps best summarised in the reflective journal of one of the pre-service study participants:

As a group I felt that we left [the Aboriginal college] stronger and more confident as teachers. Throughout our careers we are always going to have Indigenous students in our care. This unit has allowed me to see how I can best help the Aboriginal students I will teach. If my peers and I can inspire just a few Indigenous students to break away from society’s perception, collectively we can assist a large group of Indigenous students in reforming their identity. I understand that a reform like this cannot happen instantaneously, and there are many more factors besides education that need to be considered. But maybe education is the key. Maybe education is the starting block for students, teachers and Aboriginal communities to begin an identity reformation within western society. And maybe this ideology I have grew from something unexplainable or maybe it grew from my involvement with this service-learning experience ... (Kate)

### 6.4 Personal Impact Statement

It has been a privilege and honour to work as the researcher who has studied the effect of the service-learning experience on twenty-four pre-service teachers as they interacted with a similar number of secondary Aboriginal students. I have been inspired by the relationships that I have observed develop during the period of the study and beyond. Over half of the pre-service teachers had never spoken to an Aboriginal person prior to the study, and admitted mixed feelings about participating in the service-
learning experience. Within a short space of time, the pre-service teachers’ fears, reluctance and stereotypical misconceptions dissipated and turned to joy, enthusiasm and intrigue as they began to learn about the Aboriginal students. Indeed the scene was set with two culturally diverse groups of young Australians discovering how similar they were in their hopes and dreams, goals and aspirations for the future. Many stories were told, with the pre-service teachers frequently sharing how respectful, well-mannered and eager to learn were the Aboriginal students. I agree wholeheartedly with Professor Dodson’s opening statement that it is the energy, enthusiasm and aspirations of children and young people that will provide the hope for the future where Closing the Gap becomes a term of the past. Service-learning provided the bridge that enabled the divide between two cultures to be overcome and a pathway to reconciliation to be paved.
Appendices

Appendix A: ........................................................................... Human Research Ethics Approval /Letter of response/ Catholic Education Office

Appendix B: ........................................................................... Participant Information Sheet

Appendix C: ........................................................................... Consent Form

Appendix D: ........................................................................... Interview Schedule

Appendix E: ........................................................................... Interview Questions

Appendix F: ........................................................................... Staff Interview Questions

Appendix G: ........................................................................... Letter of Invitation to participants

Appendix H: ........................................................................... Weekly Journal Reflection Framework
Appendix A: Human Research Ethics Approval

30 June 2011

Gianda Cain
School of Education
The University of Notre Dame, Australia
Sydney Campus

Ref: # 011043F

Dear Glenda,

I am writing to you in regards to your Low Risk Application for Ethics Clearance for your proposed research project, to be undertaken as student at The University of Notre Dame Australia. The title of the project is: “Service Learning as a Way of 

developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Indigenous education.”

I am pleased to advise that your proposal has been reviewed by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee and approval has been endorsed conditional on the following issues being addressed:

- researcher to alter Section 4.3 to clarify the de-identification of data
- researcher to add the following statement to the participant information sheet “choosing to participate or not will not impact on your studies and both the interview and reflective journal will not be part of your assessment”.

Please send your response addressing each of the issues as listed above, including supporting information where applicable, to me at Natalie.Giles@nd.edu.au by Thursday 14 July 2011. Failure to respond and/or communicate by this time could result in a suspension of the ethical review of the project.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

Dr Natalie Giles
Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee
Research Office

cc: Professor Richard Bracht, Supervisor, School of Education
30th June 2011-06-30

Dr Natalie Giles
Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Research Office
University of Notre Dame
Fremantle 6959

Ref: # 011043F

Dear Natalie,

In reference to the conditional approval of Low Risk application for Ethics Clearance of my doctoral proposal project entitled “Service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Indigenous education,” I have made the requested changes. These being:

- The altering of Section 4.3 clarifying the de-identification of data
- The addition of the sentence “Choosing to participate or not will not impact on your studies and both the interview and reflective journal will not be part of your assessment”, has been made to the participant information sheet.

I ask that these changes be noted and that full ethics approval be granted.

Please note that my address is the School of Education, Fremantle Campus.

Yours sincerely

Glenda Cain
PhD Candidate
ID 20110199
8 July 2011

Mrs Glenda Cain
School of Education
The University of Notre Dame Australia
PO Box 1226
FREMANTLE WA 6959

Dear Glenda

RE: SERVICE-LEARNING AS A WAY OF DEVELOPING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS’ KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTION, AND CULTURAL AWARENESS OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Thank you for your completed application received 4 July 2011, whereby this PhD project envisages providing the essence and impact of service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness with regard to Indigenous education, through exposure to an Indigenous setting.

I give in principle support for the selected Catholic school in Western Australia to participate in this valuable study. However, consistent with CEOWA policy, participation in your research project will be the decision of the individual principal and staff members.

As your research project is being conducted for longer than one year, the condition of CEOWA approval is that a completion of annual reports as well as a final report are to be forwarded to the CEOWA.

Responsibility for quality control of ethics and methodology of the proposed research resides with the institution supervising the research. The CEOWA notes that the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee has granted permission for this research project until 4 July 2014 (Reference Number: 011043F).

Any changes to the proposed methodology will need to be submitted for CEOWA approval prior to implementation. The focus and outcomes of your research project are of interest to the CEOWA. It is therefore a condition of approval that the research findings of this study are forwarded to the CEOWA.

Further enquiries may be directed to Tanya Davies at dave.tanya@ceo.wa.edu.au or (08) 6380 5379.

I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Ron Dullard

50 Ruby Street, Leederville WA 6007 PO Box 198, Leederville WA 6903 T (08) 6380 5210 F (08) 6380 5110
E dullard.ron@ceo.wa.edu.au W ceo.wa.edu.au
Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Dear [Name],

My name is Glienda Cain. I am a student at The University of Notre Dame Australia, currently enrolled in a Doctor of Philosophy through the School of Education. My supervisor for the doctoral studies is Professor Richard Berlach. As part of my doctoral studies, I am undertaking a research study.

The title of the research study is "SERVICE-LEARNING AS A WAY OF DEVELOPING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTIONS AND CULTURAL AWARENESS OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION".

My research concerns the impact of the service-learning experience at an Indigenous educational setting, on the lives of the pre-service teachers who participate in the diagnostic literacy clinic.

The purpose of the study is to determine the way that service-learning impacts of the knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of the pre-service teachers as they tutor Indigenous students at an Indigenous educational setting.

Participants may be asked to take part in three different procedures to attain information related to the experience:

1. A taped interview prior to the commencement of the service-learning experience (30 minutes)
2. Write a reflective journal after each tutoring session (30 mins; for 10 sessions)
3. A semi-structured interview at the conclusion of the service-learning experience (40 mins; audio-recording)

Information collected during the study will be strictly confidential. This confidentiality will only be broken in the instance of legal requirements such as court subpoenas, freedom of information requests or mandated reporting by some professionals. To protect the anonymity of participants in a project with a small sample size, a code will be assigned to each of the participants to minimise the risk of identification.

Choosing to participate or not will not impact on your studies and both the interview and reflective journal will not be part of your assessment.

The protocol adopted by the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee for the protection of privacy will be adhered to and relevant sections of the Privacy Act are available at http://www.hrec.nee.gov.au/

You will be offered a transcript of the interview, and I would be grateful if you would comment on whether you believe I have captured your experience. Before the interview I will ask you to sign a consent form. You may withdraw from the project at any time. Data collected will be stored securely in the University's School of Education for five years. No identifying information will be used and the results from the study will be made freely available to all participants.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Notre Dame Australia has approved the study.

Professor Richard Berlach, the Associate Dean of the School of Education is supervising the research. If you have any queries regarding the research, please contact me directly (9433 0174) or Professor Berlach by phone (08) 9433 or by email at richard.berlach@nd.edu.au.

I thank you for your consideration and hope you will agree to participate in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

Glienda Cain

Tel: (08) 9433 0174  Email: glienda.cain@nd.edu.au

If participants have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it should be directed to the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Office, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6915, phone (08) 9433 0943.

Information sheet template: July 08
Appendix C: Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, (participant’s name) ___________________________ hereby agree to being a participant in the above research project.

- I have read and understood the Information Sheet about this project and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I may withdraw from participating in the project at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information gathered by the researcher will be treated as strictly confidential, except in instances of legal requirements such as court subpoenas, freedom of information requests, or mandated reporting by some professionals.
- I understand that I will be interviewed by the researcher and that the interview will be audio-taped.
- Whilst the research involves small sample sizes I understand that a code will be ascribed to all participants to ensure that the risk of identification is minimised.
- I understand that the protocol adopted by the University Of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee for the protection of privacy will be adhered to and relevant sections of the Privacy Act are available at http://www.nhrareg.gov.au/
- I agree that any research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not disclosed.

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<th>PARTICIPANT’S SIGNATURE:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCHER’S FULL NAME:</th>
<th>GLENDA CAIN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCHER’S SIGNATURE:</td>
<td>1/7/2011</td>
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If participants have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it should be directed to the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Office, The University of Notre Dame Australia, PO Box 1225 Fremantle WA 6929, phone (08) 9433 0943.

Consent form template July 08
Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Welcome to this research study on “Service-learning as a way of developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and cultural awareness of Indigenous education”. Your participation is appreciated.

I would like to clarify the difference between this research study and the unit of study ED3102. This study does not impact in any way on your achievement in ED3102. I have no role in the assessment of the ED3102.
I will be attending the tutoring sessions and assisting in the tutorials, but I have no influence on your marks.

Do you understand the Information Sheet? Are there any points that need clarification?
I would like to check that the Consent Form has been understood and signed.
I will need to maintain contact with you especially in relation to your weekly journal reflections. Which form of communication is best suited to your circumstances?
   Email – weekly reminder and recording sheet
   Journal book of duplicate pages
   Reflection sheet copied for you
   Survey monkey- on line responses
   other ______________

You will also have a reflective journal as part of ED3102. These are totally separate; however you may want to keep a copy of your reflections to support your assignment submission. Throughout the service-learning experience you are very welcome to come and share your thoughts, feelings, concerns, or ideas at any time. Please just make contact with me through emails, phone calls, or in person. I would like you to feel that our communication will be open, honest and strictly confidential, with your anonymity assured. Please feel confident that I am acting only as a researcher interested to know how this experience impacts on you. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Glenda Cain
Appendix E: Interview Questions

Pre-experience questions
1. Why have you chosen to participate in this unit of study at _________ Aboriginal College?
2. What do you believe you will gain from this experience?
3. What challenges do you think you might face?
4. What experience have you had in working with Indigenous students?
5. What do you believe is important in teaching in Indigenous educational context?
6. What do you believe is important in literacy learning / teaching?
7. What do you understand by the term “service-learning”?
8. Is there anything else that you might like to add before you begin your unit of study at ___________ Aboriginal College?

Post interview questions
1. Tell me about your experience while participating in the diagnostic literacy clinic at ___________ Aboriginal College.
2. What did you gain from the experience?
3. What challenges did you face?
4. Before the experience, you identified the cultural context, and not knowing where they were coming from perhaps as a challenge.
5. Can you comment on how you found this?
6. How did you find working with your Aboriginal student?
7. What do you believe is important in teaching within an Indigenous educational context?
8. What did you learn about yourself as a teacher? Professionally?
9. How has this experience impacted on you personally?
10. What do you understand now by the term “service-learning”?
11. Are there any other comments you would like to make about this experience?
12. If you have any further thoughts about this experience that you would like to share, please feel free to make contact with me.
Appendix F: Staff Interview Questions

Staff Participant:
Date:
Transcription:
Interview schedule followed and discussed.

Interview Questions
1. Can you tell me about your role at ________Aboriginal College?
2. How long have you been working at ________Aboriginal College?
3. I am interested in your perceptions on the impact of the service-learning tuition program between the ________ students and the UNDA pre-service teachers. Could you comment on how you see the pre-service teachers have managed this experience?
4. What have you noticed about the impact on the ________Aboriginal student?
5. Could you comment on any other areas that may have been impacted by this program?
6. What do you believe is important in teaching in an Indigenous educational context?
7. What qualities would you look for in a teacher’s application to work at this College?
8. Is there anything else that you might like to add related to this experience?
Appendix G: Letter of Invitation to Participants

Glenda Cain  
School of Education  
University of Notre Dame  
P.O. Box 1225  
Fremantle. 6959.

Dear Participant,

I am writing to you as I understand you will be participating in the unit of study ED3102 at _______Aboriginal College. This is an exciting and challenging unit of study and I am pleased that you have decided to be part of this. As a result of the trial of this unit of study in 2010, I have decided to use this experience as the basis of my doctoral studies. I am hoping that you will be a participant in this study. As such I have included the required ethics forms from the University of Notre Dame Ethics Committee with this letter. Please take time to read these and if you are willing to be in the study, I would like to talk with you about your role and how it will support my work.

I would also like to have an interview with you prior to the commencement of Semester 2. This will be an opportunity for me to clarify the study and your participation in it. I would like to allow about 45 minutes for the interview and would appreciate if you could make a time with me as soon as possible. Please phone me at work on 9433 0174 or send an email to Glenda.cain@nd.edu.au.

Thank you for your support  
Yours truly

Glenda Cain  
18/07/2011
Appendix H: Weekly Journal Reflection Framework (optional)

Please feel free to add any comments where appropriate. Your responses are confidential and will be coded to ensure anonymity. I would appreciate if these reflections could be emailed to me each week as they are completed.

Date: __________________________ Name: __________________________

From your experience to date, what have you become aware of in relation to?

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<td>Other points of learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>How are you feeling?</td>
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List of References


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