Positive Self–Identity for Indigenous Students and its Relationship to School Outcomes

**A project funded by the Commonwealth Department
of Education Training and Youth Affairs**

July 2000

Queensland University of Technology

Nola Purdie
Penny Tripcony
Gillian Boulton-Lewis
John Fanshawe
Andrew Gunstone

Contents

Acknowledgments

Finally, the project would not have been possible without the willing participation of students, teachers, principals, AIEWs, and Indigenous community members including parents and other family members, education consultants, and members of ASSPA committees.

Executive Summary

This project concerns the relationship between school outcomes and the self-identities of young Indigenous Australians. Evidence from a range of sources indicates that Indigenous students have markedly lower school participation, retention, and success rates than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Such outcomes are not likely to enhance the post-school options for these students. It is generally believed that successful completion of secondary school is necessary if young people are to have access to the full range of further education, training, employment and life chances, consistent with their abilities. Thus, it becomes essential to find ways to enhance Indigenous students' commitment and connection to schooling. Positive self-identity has been suggested as one of the factors that is related to attachment to school and positive school outcomes for Indigenous students.

The investigation described in this report was commissioned by the Analysis and Equity Branch of the International, Analysis and Evaluation Division of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). The aims of the project were to:

- define the concept of positive self-identity for Indigenous students;
- identify the factors that contribute to positive self-identity formation;
- analyse the role of positive self-identity in affecting school outcomes for Indigenous students;
- devise a working definition of positive self-identity for Indigenous students; and
- suggest practical strategies for increasing the positive self-identity of Indigenous students in order to improve their school outcomes.

Exploring the role of positive self-identity in improving school outcomes for Indigenous Australians fits with the Government's goals for Indigenous education. The goals focus on improving school attendance and English literacy and numeracy skills.

Methods

There were two major elements to the project.

First, a detailed review of the literature on self-identity was undertaken. The review examined the meaning of positive self-identity in terms of both the individual's sense of self and the sociocultural context in which that sense is developed, particularly in respect of Indigenous Australians; it examined the relationship of positive self-identity to various related concepts, such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-regulation; it explored ways to assess or measure positive self-identity; it examined the factors that contribute to positive self-identity formation; and it explored ways of fostering positive self-identity in order to improve the school outcomes of Indigenous students in Australia.

An important aspect of the review was the incorporation of theory and research into self-identity across a range of cultures—Western and non-Western, Indigenous and non-Indigenous—in an attempt to identify shared understandings of the nature of self-identity. However, although it was relatively easy to obtain studies on self-identity, it was not so easy to obtain studies of self-identity among Indigenous Australians. For instance, of the literature indexed in ERIC and

PsycLIT since 1981, there were 522 studies located by simply using the term "self-identity"; however, none of these studies focussed on self-identity and Indigenous Australians. In the Australian data-base AUSTROM, there were no studies indexed under "Indigenous self-identity", and only four under "Aboriginal self-identity". Thus, for the purposes of the review, literature on self-identity as it applies to Indigenous Australians was derived mostly from sources in which identity was not the major focus of the study or paper.

Second, consultations were conducted with a national sample of Indigenous community members (students, parents/carers, teachers, principals, and AIEWs) and non-Indigenous teachers and principals. The broad objective of the consultations was to gain information and insights in relation to Indigenous people's perceptions of positive self-identity as it applies to their young people, particularly in relation to school attendance and outcomes.

Consultations were conducted in all States and Territories. Sites for the consultations were selected so as to ensure that a range of community types and contexts were included. For example, we visited urban, rural and remote areas; primary and secondary schools; schools with large and small proportions of Indigenous students; and Indigenous community schools. Schools from all three school sectors were represented.

Three sets of data were collected. The first and major data set pertains to consultations conducted with students, parents/carers, and members of school staff in all States and Territories over a five week period. At the same time as these consultations were conducted, a small set of self-concept survey data was collected from Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous students. Finally, and at the request of the members of the project Steering Committee, supplementary consultations were conducted with students in four schools, two of which were visited during the initial consultations. The purpose of these consultations was to consult with Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous students to provide a point of comparison on issues raised in the initial consultations and the survey data.

Summary of results

This report is a synthesis of the two major elements of the project. Each of these project elements, together with a detailed annotated bibliography of literature relevant to the project, is available from DETYA. The results are summarised in terms of nine questions that were posed by the project steering committee.

Question 1: What is self-identity in the Indigenous Australian context and how does it relate to other concepts such as self-concept; self esteem; self-reliance; self-discipline; self-regulation and a sense of responsibility?

Self-identity is a complex and multifaceted construct:

- it varies according to context;
- it has multiple dimensions that are valued differently by different individuals;
- it involves both positive and negative aspects;
- there are issues surrounding conflict, uncertainty, and confusion;
- there are within-group differences;
- of the related constructs of self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-regulation, self efficacy beliefs are particularly important for school outcomes; and
- in some instances, it involves constant reassessment of self as an Indigenous Australian.

Particularly important in terms of self-identity for Indigenous people are kinship group, sense of history, language, traditional practices, and place. These "cultural markers" probably do not contribute to the sense of self as a student in a school setting. More important in this respect are the efficacy beliefs that students have about their ability to succeed in a context that is sometimes alien and antithetical to home values and practices.

When young people have positive conceptions of themselves both as Indigenous people and as students, attachment and commitment to school, and successful school performance will be more likely outcomes than when there are excessive contradictions or tensions between the various aspects of self.

Questions 2/3: How is self-identity formed? What factors contribute to the development of positive self-identity by Indigenous young people?

Self-identity is formed through interactions with the environment (including culture and society, family, peers, and school and work environments) and interpretations of those interactions. Positive self-identity is promoted when young people can successfully integrate the various aspects of themselves without having to deal with excessive contradictions in the behaviours and emotions associated with those different aspects.

The most important influences (both positive and negative) in shaping the identities of Indigenous young people appear to be:

- family and the wider Indigenous community—values, practices, support;
- significant people within the school—teachers, principals, parents/carers, AIEWs, peers;
- school systems and activities—curriculum, language, alternative programs, vocational education, Indigenous cultural activities
- role models, particularly Indigenous role models; and
- the wider Australian community (e.g., media, the police).

Question 4: What is the relative importance of these factors in the development of positive self-identity for Indigenous young people?

The attitude and behaviour of significant others are the most important factors in the development and maintenance of a positive self-identity for Indigenous students. Within the home context, parents/carers and grandparents are especially influential. Within the school context, teachers have most impact on the development of positive self-identity. Other important influences include: AIEWs; Indigenous community members and groups; ASSPA program groups; school systems and curricula such as class groupings, homework centres, Indigenous languages, and vocational education opportunities; role models who are sports people; peers; opportunities to engage in cultural activities.

Question 5: To what extent does positive self-identity vary with context?

There was some evidence that positive self-identity was influenced by context for Indigenous students. In some instances, this was dependent upon the presence of other Indigenous students. Different dimensions of students' identities (e.g., cultural identity, identity as a student) also appeared to be contextually based; more research, however, is needed to tease out the differences between students from different areas—urban, regional, remote. The different dimensions of identity did not always appear to be clearly related—identity as an Indigenous person could be positive, whereas identity as a student could be negative. Furthermore, identity as an Indigenous

person could be positive in the presence of other Indigenous people, but negative in a largely non-Indigenous classroom.

Question 6: Does positive self-identity in young Indigenous people vary in relation to geographical factors?

Although there was a strong sense of allegiance to a general Indigenous identity by most students (evident, for example, when they referred to such things as the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags, Indigenous role models, and their recent history in relation to contact with non-Indigenous people), the concept of "pan-Aboriginality", whereby Indigenous Australians have often been referred to as a single entity, was not a reality in the various settings in which interviews and focus groups were conducted. Through their responses, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people demonstrated their individuality within the specific social and cultural sub-groups of which they are members, although there was some evidence of unique features of Indigenous cultures that were relative to location according to remote, regional and urban areas. These included strength of cultural identity, language group, and career aspirations.

Question 7: How can positive self-identity be assessed or measured?

A list of instruments that measure aspects of identity, self-concept and self-esteem was gleaned from the literature. Several scales have been specifically designed to measure ethnic identity. Some scales are based on the proposal that identity formation occurs in stages. For example, adolescence appears to be a critical stage in identity formation, which has been found to be area-specific. Many of the more recent measures are based on a multidimensional model of self-concept which considers such dimensions as social, emotional, academic, family, peer, and physical self-concepts. Some researchers have used established instruments, others have specifically designed instruments to meet the requirements of the study; alternative methods of investigation have included interview and observation techniques.

There is some evidence to suggest that tests designed in one culture can be used successfully to explore differences between the self-perceptions of individuals in that culture and the self-perceptions of individuals from another culture; however, there is a need for a specific instrument to be developed for Indigenous Australians, and this should be done in consultation with Indigenous researchers.

Question 8: What is the relationship between positive self-identity (if any) and the school success of Indigenous young people, including their attendance levels, participation in school, levels of achievement, and completion of schooling?

Students in the current study showed positive self-identity as Indigenous people but this was not necessarily linked with successful educational outcomes. Positive self-identity *as a student*, however, is likely to be associated with school success. To develop positive self-identity as a student, Indigenous students need to perceive value in schooling. Factors associated with this include:

- school—where students have a sense of belonging;
- teachers—who are warm, supportive, and have positive expectations;
- curriculum—which has relevance; and
- support and encouragement from family, peers and community.

A model was developed illustrating factors involved in achieving successful educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Question 9: How can positive self-identity be increased in order to improve school outcomes for Indigenous students?

In terms of attachment to and participation in school, students need to feel valued as Indigenous people. In terms of school performance, students need to value the attainment of the academic, personal, and social skills commonly promoted in Australian schools and perceive themselves to be capable of such attainment. Attention needs to be focussed on:

- the qualities of teachers;
- school organisation and curriculum issues;
- continued bilingual language programs where appropriate;
- involvement of Indigenous people in schools;
- discipline practices within schools;
- alternative education programs;
- career education;
- family and community support; and
- promotion of a range of Indigenous role models.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

❑ It is recommended that

(a) Local education providers work with individual Indigenous communities to determine ways in which education can better work with other services including health and social services to enable education and other services to be planned and delivered in a more cohesive manner. This could include the development of physical facilities and services in a more integrated manner. By better integrating services, communities are in a better position to address interrelationships between such areas as education outcomes, health, self-esteem and self-worth, and spiritual and physical wellbeing.

Schools, especially in rural and remote areas, should take a leadership role in planning how services can be better integrated within communities in acknowledgment of the vital importance of such service provision to the long-term future of children. Government could play a role in assisting local communities specifically by advising as to how to best organise and provide access to Government services, and by overseeing planning processes if required.

(b) Personnel in schools should seek to be fully informed on Indigenous issues, both on a local level and more broadly. This is to ensure they are in the best position to plan and coordinate services to the benefit of the Indigenous community.

Recommendation 2:

❑ It is recommended that

(a) Schools appointing Indigenous education workers should clearly define and state the role of this position within the context of the total school. Schools should ensure that opportunities exist for Indigenous education workers to undertake training appropriate to those duties.

(b) Where possible, schools which do not have an Indigenous education worker because they have insufficient numbers of Indigenous students (under 30 students) seek to enter into cooperative arrangements with schools in a similar situation to effectively 'share' an Indigenous education worker. In schools where there are only very small numbers of Indigenous students, local Indigenous communities should consider recruiting volunteers to provide assistance.

Recommendation 3:

❑ It is recommended that
(a) A plan be developed to address teacher awareness of the importance of and use of Aboriginal English by Indigenous students, including the difference between Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English;
(b) Bilingual education is continued or implemented where appropriate, but with an early introduction of English into classroom activities;
(c) Indigenous teachers as well as community members play a greater role in establishing Indigenous languages, and English literacy and numeracy competencies, for Indigenous students within schools.

Recommendation 4:

❑ It is recommended that schools implement Indigenous studies as perspectives across curriculum in all years of formal schooling; and in the form of modules and discrete subjects in the secondary years of schooling.

Recommendation 5:

❑ It is recommended that
(a) Teacher education institutions develop specialised modules and units–within undergraduate, post graduate and/or professional programs–focussing on Indigenous education for existing and prospective teachers. Modules or units might be on issues such as Indigenous health and schooling, Indigenous policies and programs, and Indigenous languages, –and include strategies on how to work with parents and the community, how to work with Indigenous students, and methods for successful teaching of subjects such as mathematics to Indigenous students.
(b) All teachers appointed to remote area Indigenous schools receive appropriate induction into the school and community, and have available to them appropriate support mechanisms throughout their tenure. It would be desirable, although not essential, that teachers appointed to remote area Indigenous schools have at least 12 months teaching experience or have undertaken a practical component of their teacher education program in an Indigenous school.

Recommendation 6:

❑ It is recommended that in order to increase the number of teachers available to teach Indigenous students, more flexible pathways be developed to enable articulation from lower level qualifications into teacher education. In particular, pathways should exist for AIEWs who have demonstrated both the potential and desire to become a teacher, and have demonstrated a firm commitment to assisting Indigenous students, to make a smooth transition to teaching. A campaign to promote the teaching profession to Indigenous Australians, and alternative modes of entry to it could be undertaken. Consideration could also be given to an incentive scheme to attract Indigenous people to the teaching profession.

Recommendation 7:

❑ It is recommended that vocational education subjects within secondary schools be planned and offered in collaboration with local employers and Indigenous communities to enhance employment options for Indigenous students.

Recommendation 8:

❑ It is recommended that
   (a) A national campaign promoting positive images of Indigenous adults, adolescents and children (within a range of employment, education and/or leisure contexts) to the total Australian community be implemented, to help remove some of the current negative perceptions of Indigenous people.
   (b) Schools be encouraged to promote local Indigenous people from a range of employment, education and leisure contexts, as role models for Indigenous students. This could be done by involving such role models in school activities and by having them present their experiences to students. Local communities could also encourage such role models to take on the additional role of mentor to individual students. As a mentor, a person who has demonstrated positive achievements in their community could provide encouragement and advice to a student in a way that promotes the value of education and training and helps develop career aspirations. They could also provide valuable guidance for students who have been identified as being at risk of dropping out of school.

Recommendation 9:

❑ It is recommended that
   (a) Schools, particularly in rural and remote areas, consider a number of strategies to increase the access and participation of Indigenous students. This would include a more flexible approach to curriculum delivery and school organisation. In remote communities, schools should consider employing more flexible hours to encourage students to attend and to fit in with activities in the local community that may otherwise take them away from the classroom. There is also a need, overall, to provide greater access to secondary school for students in remote areas. Strategies such as multi-strand class groupings could be considered as a means of improving access.
   (b) Parents should work with schools in rural and remote communities to encourage them to become an integral part of the community. For example, this may mean holding joint meetings in community halls or local clubs rather than on school premises, schools participating in community celebrations and activities when invited, and welcoming community participation in school planning activities.
   (c) Communities and schools should encourage parents to play a greater role in promoting the value of education to their children and encouraging their participation in programs and activities organised by schools, and by attending ASSPA meetings regularly. In rural and remote communities where schools have the capacity to play a more central role in community activities and planning processes, parents can assist by becoming involved in committees and other organisational groups.
   (d) Schools that have adopted a flexible approach to their organisation, curriculum or structure to the demonstrable benefit of students, or who have improved the educational outcomes within their communities by becoming involved in community planning or organisation, should be identified and promoted as models of good practice schools. Governments should take an active role in regularly publicising such achievements to other schools, and acknowledging such schools as models of best practice.

Recommendation 10:

❑ Given the lack of similar studies by which to measure Indigenous Australian self-identity, it is recommended that a subsequent study be undertaken over a longer period of time. A second study might revisit sites and individuals interviewed in this study; explore the self-identity of Indigenous students in relation to the way their community, whether it be urban or regional, perceives itself; and compare these findings to a greater extent with the relationship of positive self-identity and school outcomes for non-Indigenous students.

Limitations of the project

There were several limitations associated with the conduct of the consultations that should be noted. The timeframe for the collection of data was very short and this imposed organisational difficulties in terms of such things as interstate travel, and the development of a population of schools that was willing and available to be involved in the project at short notice. Greater opportunity to develop rapport with participants may have led to the development of a richer data set—the reliability or trustworthiness of ethnographic studies traditionally depends on such things as prolonged and persistent engagement with participants, and the checking of the researchers' interpretations by the study participants.

A more detailed understanding of the links between the positive self-identity of Indigenous students and the outcomes of schooling might have been obtained with greater opportunity to compare those same links in a bigger population of non-Indigenous students than was available in the current study. Findings from the limited set of comparison data that was obtained in the current study suggest that this could be a fruitful avenue to be explored in a future project.

Another limitation of this study relates to the limited discussions we had with non-attenders in schools. In general, the students who did participate in the consultations were the more regular attenders. Although peers offered some thoughts about issues related to the identities of non-attenders in their answers to such questions as "Why do you think some of your friends don't come to school?", more detailed data might have been obtained from primary sources, although this would have been more difficult to achieve in most instances. The project on positive self-identity for Indigenous students ran concurrently with another research project that examined the school attendance rates for Indigenous students. The findings of that project are expected to provide more substantial information about the patterns of school attendance of Indigenous students.

Top

Background and Introduction to the Project

Numerous reviews, inquiries and consultations conducted in recent years have all demonstrated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people place a high priority on education. They want for themselves and their children no less by way of educational opportunity than is afforded to other Australians. They expect that educational processes should lead them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to realise their individual potential, lead satisfying lives, and contribute actively to the community. (AEP, 1993, p. 6)

The *Positive Self-Identity for Indigenous Students and its Relationship to School Outcomes* project is an initiative of the Analysis and Equity Branch of the International, Analysis and Evaluation Division of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

It has been suggested that positive self-identity is one of the factors that result in a greater commitment and connection to schooling by Indigenous students, leading to better school outcomes. The attainment of successful school outcomes by Indigenous students implies that they will have access to the full range of further education, training, employment and life chances, consistent with their abilities.

The need to address continued educational inequities is recognised by the Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs who this year released the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*:

Schooling should be socially just, so that . . . Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and over time, match those of other students (3; 3.3).

The project

The aims of the current project as proposed by the DETYA project Steering Committee were to:

- define the concept of positive self-identity for Indigenous students;
- identify the factors that contribute to positive self-identity formation;
- analyse the role of positive self-identity in affecting school outcomes for Indigenous students;
- devise a working definition of positive self-identity for Indigenous students; and
- suggest practical strategies for increasing the positive self-identity of Indigenous students in order to improve their school outcomes.

To achieve these aims, the project was conducted in two stages during the period May to October 1999 by a team of researchers from Queensland University of Technology's School of Learning and Development and Oodgeroo Unit.

In the first stage, a detailed review of the literature on self-identity and related constructs was undertaken. The literature was drawn from Australian and international sources and it pertained to the meaning of positive self-identity in terms of both the individual's sense of self and the sociocultural context in which that sense is developed.

In the second stage, two sets of consultations were conducted. The first and major consultations were conducted with a national sample of Indigenous community members (students, parents/carers, teachers, AIEWs), and non-Indigenous teachers. The broad objective of the consultations was to gain information and insights in relation to Indigenous people's perceptions of positive self-identity as it applies to their young people, particularly in relation to school attendance and outcomes. Supplementary consultations were conducted in four schools with a small sample of Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous students in order to provide a point of comparison on issues raised in the major consultations. The methodology for the consultations is summarised in Appendix A.

In planning the consultations, and in the analysis of the data collected from those consultations, we were guided by the literature on self-identity, and by the project aims, requirements and nine questions proposed by the project steering committee:

1. What is self-identity in the Indigenous Australian context and how does it relate to other concepts such as self-concept; self esteem; self-reliance; self-discipline; self-regulation and a sense of responsibility?
2. How is self-identity formed?
3. What factors contribute to the development of positive self-identity by Indigenous young people?
4. What is the relative importance of these factors in the development of positive self-identity for Indigenous young people?
5. To what extent does positive self-identity vary with context?
6. Does positive self-identity in young Indigenous people vary in relation to geographical factors?
7. How can positive self-identity be assessed or measured?
8. What is the relationship between positive self-identity (if any) and the school success of Indigenous young people, including their attendance levels, participation in school, levels of achievement, and completion of schooling?
9. How can positive self-identity be increased in order to improve school outcomes for Indigenous students (assuming that a clear positive relationship does exist)?

The project's progress was monitored by members of a Steering Committee from DETYA, who provided direction and advice to the research team. In April, July and August 1999, research team members formally presented methodological and progress reports to the Steering Committee, and to a Reference Committee representative of all States' and Territories' Indigenous education consultative/advisory bodies, as well as government and non-government school education providers.

Structure of the Report

The current report is a synthesis of the two major elements of the project—the review of the literature, and the consultations. Each of these project elements, together with a detailed annotated bibliography of literature relevant to the project, is available from DETYA.

The synthesis is structured around the nine questions listed above.

Terminology

To differentiate between material that was derived from the review of the literature and material that was derived from the consultations, the term "the current study" has been used when referring to consultation findings.

'Indigenous', when used in relation to the Australian context, refers to a person who is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and identifies as an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and is accepted as such by the community in which s/he lives or has lived. When specific reference is made in the literature or in the consultations to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, we have maintained that terminology. When no distinction has been made, we have used the term 'Indigenous'.

The term 'black' has been used, particularly in some of the earlier literature, when referring to African American people. In Australia, the term has been used by some writers when referring to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Similarly, the term 'white' has sometimes been used in the literature to refer to non-Indigenous people. Both terms ('black' and 'white') were used by some of the participants in the consultations. In such instances, we have retained the use of these terms.

'School' is taken to include all years of primary and secondary school and both private and public schools.

'School outcomes' covers a range of indicators, including but not limited to school attendance rates, literacy and numeracy achievement and completion of non-compulsory secondary schooling.

Acronyms

AEP	(National) Aboriginal (and Torres Strait Islander) Education Policy
AIEW	Aboriginal and (Torres Strait) Islander Education Worker
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (Program)
ATAS	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
DETYA	(Commonwealth) Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
IESIP	Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal (and Torres Strait) Islander Day Observance Committee
NATSIEW	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Website
P & C	Parents and Citizens (Association)

Synthesis of Findings of the Review of the Literature and the Consultations

Question 1: **What is self-identity in the Indigenous Australian context? How does it relate to concepts such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-regulation and a sense of responsibility?**

Results of the consultations with Indigenous Australian school students and those associated with their education, revealed that self-identity is a complex and multifaceted construct. The following features of self-identity for Indigenous Australian students were apparent:

- it varies according to context;
- it has multiple dimensions that are valued differently by different individuals;
- it involves both positive and negative aspects;
- there are issues surrounding conflict, uncertainty, and confusion;
- there are within-group differences;
- of the related constructs of self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-regulation, self efficacy beliefs are particularly important; and
- in some instances, it involves constant reassessment of self as an Indigenous Australian.

Positive self-identity for Indigenous students means they will have positive conceptions of the multiple dimensions of themselves, particularly as Indigenous Australians and as students. These positive conceptions will be valued and nurtured by significant others in each of the contexts in which they function, most importantly within the home and school environments. When young people have positive conceptions of themselves both as Indigenous people and as students, attachment and commitment to school, and successful school performance will be more likely outcomes than when there are excessive contradictions or tensions between the various aspects of self.

Although self-identity has been conceptualised from a range of perspectives, there are several key characteristics of the construct that emerge repeatedly in the literature. In the first instance, self-identity concerns both who we are, and what we think of who we are. That is, self-identity has both a knowledge and an evaluative component (Tajfel, 1982; Berry, in press). The knowledge component (often referred to as self-concept) pertains to the total set of perceptions one has of oneself. The evaluative component (usually referred to as self-esteem) is the value judgement a person places on him or herself. It is how good a person thinks he or she is (Pedersen, 1994). Although a person may have a clear conception of who he or she is, they may not like it very much. Thus, to varying degrees self-identity is either positive or negative in its construction.

The second generally agreed upon characteristic of self-identity is its multidimensional nature— that is, there can be no single conceptualisation of self that encapsulates one's total being. In this respect, Baumeister and Muraven (1996) described identity as "a set of meaningful definitions that are ascribed or attached to the self, including social roles, reputation, a structure of values

and priorities, and a conception of one's potentiality" (p. 406). Research has clearly demonstrated that people can have a very positive conception of themselves in relation to their peers, for instance, but a negative view of themselves in relation to their parents (Hattie, 1992; Purdie & Hattie, 1995). Successfully integrating the various dimensions of self is important to one's total well-being. Harter and Monsour (1992) demonstrated the dangers of excessive psychological tension in young adolescents when they become aware of contradictions in the behaviours and emotions associated with different aspects of their total selves.

Third, as well as there being multiple dimensions or aspects of self, there are multiple influences on its development including family attitudes, physical characteristics, self-perceptions, and socialisation experiences (Helms, 1990). Recently, sociocultural perspectives on human development have accentuated the importance of context in the understanding of self and the formulation of one's identity. Thus, although identity can be conceptualised as a sense of self that derives from private and personal factors, it also derives from public and social experiences (Hudspith & Williams, 1994).

Finally, because both personal characteristics (such as physical appearance) and context (such as the school) are constantly changing, self-identity is also generally conceived of as a dynamic rather than as a fixed phenomenon; it is something that is always in process and constantly being formed (Groome & Edwardson, 1996; Grotevant, 1987).

Self-Identity of Indigenous Students in Australian Contexts

For the Indigenous Australian students in the current study**, positive** aspects of self-identity mostly evolved from home, community, and school influences. This is in keeping with reports in the literature that there are multiple influences on the development of self-identity. In remote areas, in particular, the identity of young Indigenous people was very much linked to the communities in which they live. "Pan-Aboriginality"[1] (Price & Price, 1998) is not usually recognised in these remote communities because "*people of mixed ancestry are seen as being culturally different*" (Elder, remote community). Findings from another project (Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis, & Wilss) further exemplify this.

> *The day I graduated I left straight away for Weipa because my brother just married into a family up on the mission there . . . I did police liaison officer work, but didn't last too long . . . Even though they knew I was a Murri, from my brother and that, I was still an outsider, so I wasn't from there.*
> (University student)

One positive dimension to the students' identity that was particularly evident in the initial consultations was in relation to perceived sporting ability. Many of the students had strong and positive feelings about their abilities in a range of sports and they actively promoted this aspect of themselves among both their Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers. Although students indicated their interest in a range of sports, many did seem to prefer team sports. Many of the boys aspired to careers in sports such as football, basketball, soccer, and boxing. On the other hand, in the supplementary consultations, in situations in which students were less likely to be influenced by the comments of others about sporting prowess, they were equally positive about their identities as students as they were about there "sporting" identities. The possibility exists that a sporting

---

[1] Pan-Aboriginality implies that there is a single, readily identifiable identity that can be attached to all Aboriginal people. Some would argue that the search for a "pan-Aboriginality" leads to the support of ideological preconceptions, stereotyping and denial of complexity.

stereotype has been promoted to the detriment of the other aspects of the identities of Indigenous people. Greater public attention given to the non-sporting successes of Indigenous people may serve to help students value and develop more rounded conceptions of who they are, and stronger beliefs in their ability to achieve in a range of areas.

Belief in one's ability to achieve in a given task is described in the literature as **self-efficacy**. Bandura (1986) explains self-efficacy as one's ability to organise and implement actions necessary to attain skills to achieve specific tasks that affect one's life. Self-efficacy beliefs can exert a strong influence on human development and adaptation. They are influenced by environmental and social factors including family, peers, teachers, and the media, and they have been shown to influence people's aspirations, goal commitments, perseverance, and quality of analytic thinking. Self-efficacy beliefs have been strongly associated with the performance of students on a range of school-related tasks, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Thus, the implication is that although many (though not all) Indigenous students have high self-efficacy beliefs about their sporting abilities, greater attention needs to be focussed on helping them develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs about their capabilities in classroom settings.

It was also apparent that self-identity for some students remained **uncertain.** In some urban schools, young Indigenous people were not always clear in the knowledge of who they were and they struggled to understand their relationship to their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Perhaps this uncertainty or confusion can be attributed to the multidimensional nature of self-identity (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). It may also be attributed to contextual factors that involve both personal as well as social influences (Hudspith & Williams, 1994), as evidenced in the following extract.

> *Most of the kids don't look Koori, thus don't get picked on as Koori. Most of the kids don't acknowledge that they are Koori. This comes from their parents. Ever since ASSPA began, lots of parents say they are Koori. The kids are trying to work out what it means to be Koori.*
> (AIEW, urban primary school)

Even when students came from communities with a strong sense of a particular Indigenous identity, some had to **reassess** what this meant when they pursued their schooling in other places. One teacher in a high school with a large Indigenous population commented that

> *The majority of students here come from traditional backgrounds. If they are here for long periods, they learn to walk with one foot in each world.* **Conflict** *is experienced by being in this environment, compared to back home.*

For these students, self-identity is clearly a dynamic construct that is constantly evolving (Groome & Edwardson, 1996). This also means that the knowledge component of identity (Berry, in press; Tajfel, 1982) in these situations involves perceptions of one's self that are defined according to context. Constantly changing the perception one has of oneself will most likely mean that the **self-concept** one holds will also become situation specific. According to Markus and Wurf (1987) self-concept is dynamic and capable of change, with such change dependent upon **self-regulation** and self-motives such as self-enhancement or self-actualisation, as well as on the immediate social situation. It is possible that the students who are "learning to walk with one foot in each world" are also learning to self-regulate their self-concepts and to integrate the various dimensions of self. This must be done carefully and young people may need assistance, as Harter and Monsour (1992) caution that psychological tensions may eventuate when adolescents become aware of contradictions in the behaviours and emotions associated with different aspects of their total selves.

Not all differences that were noted in self-identity were regionally based. There were some reported instances of **conflict within the school Indigenous population** that resulted in some students being rejected by their Indigenous peers because they were too "white", either in appearance or in the visible signs of how they lived at home (for example, if they had relatively affluent, educated parents), and because of the high academic aspirations they held. Instances of rejection from within one's social group may lead to feelings of doubt about one's self-concept. Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) explain self-concept as one's perception of one's unique attributes and traits; if negative self-concept ensues, then students may experience depression (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

In relation to students' identities as Indigenous people, **differences** also occurred **between students within the same class**. For instance, when asked such questions as "How do you feel when you do things like Aboriginal dancing?" responses ranged from "*I feel proud of my culture*" to "*shame*"[2] and "*embarrassed*".

Essentially, then, the different dimensions of students' identities were more or less salient according to the contexts in which they found themselves and the extent to which they valued the different aspects of themselves.

Negative influences on the development of self-identity for some Indigenous Australian students in the current study were noted in relation to certain of their experiences. As self-esteem relates directly to an evaluation of overall worth as a person based on positive and negative self-perceptions (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995), then negative influences can only serve to erode the self-esteem of young Indigenous people. Negative influences also make it difficult for positive self-esteem to be nurtured to the extent that students will respect themselves and value and approve of who they are.

Although many students expressed pride in being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, they recognised that non-Indigenous people do not always place the same positive value on their Indigenous identities. Frequent experiences of **racism** were expressed, as, for example, in the following account of a student.

> *This is an example of how we get treated differently from the non-Indigenous students. Sometimes I come to school late . . . I've missed the bus (to get me there on time) . . . and the next driver says "Are you going to school?" He wouldn't ask white kids that. They have preconceived ideas about us . . . I think they get those ideas from the media . . . they think everyone's like that . . . Once people get an idea in their head, it's very hard to get it out.*

Racism was also evident within the context of the school, as exemplified in the following report made by an urban high school student.

> *There are some mean teachers. They let you down because of the colour of your skin. They help the Wadjelas more. They pick on us—that's why some Nyungars don't come to school. One teacher called my brother a 'black boong' but it was my brother who got suspended when he swore at him for calling him that.*

---

[2] A mixture of embarrassment and pride—often more embarrassment than pride, depending on the situation. "Shame" is seen by Indigenous people as a positive aspect of self-identity.

Also noted in the comments of some students was the **confusion** they felt about their Indigenous identity. On the one hand, they spoke with pride in some aspects of their culture; on the other, negative self-identity was associated with the bleak social circumstances in which some students lived. For example, one adolescent girl spoke thus:

> *I'm proud of my grandfather . . . he had his own special dance. He taught me how to do it but I can't do it any more because he died. I loved him so much, he was very special and I learnt from him. He was the first man in Yarrabah. Also my other grandfather . . . he taught me how to dance. He was an Islander.*

> *I'm not proud of my other family . . . my dad is in Cairns but I don't see him, he's sick in the head from alcohol. Apart from my mum, I only have one cousin left. Everyone has died from alcohol and drugs. My cousin had two babies but they died too.*

> *I couldn't talk about this with everyone . . . shame, and it's too sad. I would cry.*

Experiences of shame, such as that evidenced by this student, may impact negatively on one's **self-esteem**. Impaired self-esteem may also be a consequence of the perceived confusion some students have about their identities as Indigenous Australians. Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) maintain that self-esteem relates to one's overall worth as a person. Positive self-esteem is explained as respecting one's self and approving of the person one is. They maintain that although negative aspects of one's life can impose barriers to the development of a positive sense of self, they can also provide opportunities to develop positive self-esteem by presenting challenges to be met.

As well as an identity as an Indigenous person, young people also thought of themselves in other terms. For instance, some teachers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (AIEWs), and parents commented on the Americanisation of self-identity.

> *. . . the kids watch wrestling and kick-boxing . . . they're wearing caps backwards, playing American music, wearing sunnies . . . It's hard to find their own identity. Some kids are bored with Koori culture; they don't identify with it; they look more to the US culture.*
> (Koori teacher)

When some young people indicated that they did not have strong identities of themselves as students, this often appeared to be linked to the negative influence of **teachers'** forecasts for them. For example, one student reported that her teacher had told her "*You'll never get through Years 11 and 12.*" Other students also thought that some teachers perceived them as being less able than their non-Indigenous peers. They felt under great pressure to do twice as well in order to gain recognition of their efforts and academic worth ("*Lots of white people think we're not very smart*").

If students feel inferior or incapable of carrying out tasks, then their self-efficacy and self-esteem can diminish. This is particularly true for students' self-efficacy beliefs—how capable they believe themselves to be to successfully accomplish particular tasks—and this can have serious implications for success at school. Teachers (and parents) can foster positive self-esteem in students when their interactions and teaching strategies promote trust and self-reliance (McCormack, 1997). In the current study, even some students whose teachers described them as very academically able did not feel good about that aspect of their identities because there was a culture among many students of "anti-intellectualism", of doing well in school as being of little value or something to be ashamed of. For example,

> *Students have to learn that it's not "shame" to be good academically. Aboriginal kids tend to isolate smart kids. The smart kids will then drop back.*
> (AIEW, urban high school)

Thus, our data support the notion that not all Indigenous people have a shared knowledge about "self". Neither do they attach the same value to the various dimensions of who they are. From a general point of view, it appears that many of the features of self-identity as reported in the literature are similar to those features that were evident for the young people who were involved in the current study. That is, the self-identity of young Indigenous Australians is multifaceted, it is in a constant state of formation, it involves both positive and negative aspects, and it is contextually based.

From a cultural perspective, it is clear that not all Indigenous students see themselves in the same way. Some students are considerably more "Westernised" than others as evidenced in their conversations about such things as popular culture, careers aspirations, and leisure activities. Nevertheless, it is clear that most Indigenous young people do perceive themselves as belonging to a broad cultural group that is either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and that is different in many ways from the non-Indigenous group of people in Australia. The distinctive cultural "markers" in this respect relate to kinship group, sense of history, language, traditional practices, and place. That is, most Indigenous young people could talk with relative ease about the clan or group to which they belonged, the place (town, region) to which they felt a strong attachment, the language(s) they or their relations used (including Aboriginal English, although some students referred to this as "home talk" or "broken English"), and traditional cultural practices associated with their group. For many students, the terms "black" and "white" appeared to encapsulate the differences between their own cultural perspective and that of the non-Indigenous Australian person.

In general, it appears that if an Indigenous child thinks about his or her cultural identity, there is pride attached to saying "I am black", or "I am Aboriginal", or "I am a Torres Strait Islander" and this pride derives mostly from family and Indigenous community influences rather than from influences within the school or broader Australian community. However, it does not appear that most Indigenous young people dwell on their identities; in some respects they do not perceive themselves to be different from non-Indigenous people—they listen to the same music, eat KFC, barrack for this football team or that, have future aspirations, and so on. But when pressed, many appear to think that other (non-Indigenous) people think they are different. This difference is often interpreted as being inferior.

> *I'm proud of being an Aboriginal…but in public we get the blame for everything…In the shops, the security people follow us but not the others.*

> *They think we are not as good just because we are black.*

There was insufficient data obtained in this project to explore differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in terms of the factors that contribute to a sense of self. It could be suggested, for instance, that some non-Indigenous young people develop a sense of who they are based on factors such as their parents' occupation and status, rather than on their formal relationships within a group and one's sense of place, as appears to be true for some Indigenous young people, particularly in remote communities. Such an interpretation could explain the differences in career aspirations of remote and urban Indigenous students. For instance, aspirations for the Torres Strait Islander students in the current study seemed to be closely tied to

the place where they lived−for instance, fishing related activities were commonly mentioned. In urban areas, students tended to be more aware of a greater variety of options that were potentially available to them. This presents a dilemma for schools that needs to be resolved in consultation with Indigenous communities in remote areas−should schools provide careers and vocational education programs that are tied to the activities of the community or should they attempt to "broaden the horizons" of students, knowing perhaps that students will not find a broad range of jobs locally and may be reluctant to move to larger cities or regional centres to pursue alternative careers?

Top

Questions 2 & 3: How is self-identity formed? What factors contribute to the development of positive self-identity for Indigenous young people?

Self-identity is formed through interactions with the environment and interpretations of those interactions. In general, four key influences on the development of one's identity are:

- culture and society;
- family;
- peers; and
- school and work environments.

Specifically, for Indigenous Australian students, the findings of the current study indicate that the following influences are the most important in shaping their identities:

- significant people within the school—teachers, principals, parents/carers, AIEWs, peers;
- school systems—climate, homework centres, class groupings, discipline systems;
- the curriculum—Indigenous studies, languages, alternative programs, vocational education, Indigenous cultural activities;
- home/community—parents and other family members, Indigenous role models;
- general Australian community—e.g., media, police.

Self-Identity Formation

Identity formation is dependent upon both personal factors and the contexts within which individuals operate. Erikson (1968) believed that contextual factors, including the core of the culture as well as the core of the individual, were integral components of identity formation and that the successful outcome of adolescent development constituted a coherent integration of the separate aspects of functioning within one's social group. More recently, Baumeister and Muraven (1996) proposed that, whereas societies play an important role in shaping identities, individuals also exert choices that influence their identities. They regarded the role of adaptation as pivotal in this process and conceptualised individual identity as an adaptation to a social context.

Grotevant (1987) defined four contextual domains that influence identity formation, as follows:

Culture and society. Identity is culturally bound as individuals make choices about their careers, values, and relationships within a preordained cultural context. Factors such as societal norms, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender are explained as influencing how one proceeds.

10

Family. Families influence identity formation particularly when adolescence is reached and cognitive maturation facilitates decision-making processes. In families, adolescents learn how to develop their own points of view, they develop attitudes about self-expression, and a sense of self develops. These processes are dependent upon good communication between parents and the adolescent. Positive self-identity develops in adolescence when there is opportunity to identify with respected parental figures and emulate some of their desirable qualities.

Peers. Peers allow adolescents to see themselves reflected and to decide whether to reject or accept the image that is projected.

School and work environments. School and work environments allow people to learn about options regarding future work goals, and to learn about values and relationships. Identities are shaped also in response to social and academic pressures of school, or to situated practices in classrooms.

These four contextual domains are mirrored in the influences on identity formation that the current study found for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The different dimensions of self-identity, in particular identity as an Indigenous person and identity as a student, are examined by focusing first on those aspects that provide positive influences in the shaping of identities and second on factors that impact negatively on the formation of Indigenous identities.

Positive Self-Identity

The school

Significant people within the school

One of the most important contributors to the development of a positive sense of self as an Indigenous person within the context of the school is the extent to which individual **teachers exhibit an acceptance** and **valuing of Indigenous people and their culture**. Students in the current study perceived great variation among their teachers in this respect, as reflected in the following comments:

> *Some of the teachers don't like us . . . they are racist.*

> *The first principal was the best—he never growled; he was kind. If you were naughty, he just talked to you in his office.*

> *Mr R. never lets Nyungar kids down. He always says good luck for the football and stuff like that.*

When asked who their heroes were, some students nominated various of their teachers. Some students commented also on what they perceived to be a reciprocal obligation in their relationships with their teachers.

> *How you treat the teachers is how they will treat you.*

Typical of the comments about the importance of teachers were those made by a group of parents/carers in one school in which the population of Aboriginal students had grown from 6 to

around 100 in recent years. They noted that Aboriginal students wanted to come to this school because it had **good teachers**, and a good program. They said that even if the parents of the students moved to another town, students would choose to live with a relative so they could continue to be with the teacher/s they had grown to like and respect. Conversations with the principal and some of the teachers confirmed that there was indeed a genuine concern to promote the school as a place for all students, and considerable creative planning and effort had gone into developing appropriate programs for Indigenous students. The identity of Indigenous students was promoted in particular by the success of the school football team that consisted mostly of Aboriginal students. This fact was a source of pride to the whole school community.

Parents and carers were particularly aware of the importance of the **attitude and behaviour of the teachers** in the development and maintenance of a positive self-identity as an Indigenous person for students within the context of the school. For instance, one parent at an Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Program meeting commented that

> *It's important to **get the right people**. Things like having a bus to bring in the kids who don't come is a good idea, but it's a simple answer . . . just a bandaid. People are the important thing. We need teachers to have a better understanding of the culture. Teachers need to learn about the culture, not only those who are training at university but also those who are already in schools . . . who have been teaching for a long time. Teachers need to be aware of the social problems.*

Caring is a quality that Fanshawe (1989) recommended teachers of Aboriginal students should possess. He proposed that they need to be warm and supportive; make realistic demands of students; act in a responsible, businesslike and systematic manner; and be stimulating, imaginative, and original.

In terms of teacher attitude and understanding, how teachers reacted to students' use of **Aboriginal English** at school was raised as an important factor in the development of positive self-identity both as a student and as an Indigenous person. According to Phillips (1992) language is important to one's cultural identity, and acceptance of one's language serves to preserve self-respect and foster knowledge that one is valued as a person. For example, use of Aboriginal English gives Aboriginal people a feeling of comfort with each other and it is also a means by which they can identify with their own people. The current study found that several State Education Departments are seeking to influence teachers to change the socio-linguistic climate of schools so that they become more attractive and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Programs such as "Solid English" (developed in Western Australia) and "Deadly Eh Cuz: Teaching Speakers of Koori English" (developed in Victoria) are based on the notion that Aboriginal cultures and ways of looking at the world and Aboriginal ways of using English are fundamentally different from those of non-Aboriginal people.

> *Students need to continue to use (and feel good about using) Aboriginal English. Standard Australian English needs to be an addition to their linguistic repertoire, not a replacement... Students who constantly have their speech corrected, quickly learn that it is easier and less harrowing just to say nothing. Such corrections inevitably affect how they perceive themselves and force them into a dilemma: what parts can be revealed at school and what parts must be hidden for fear of further disapproving correction.*
> (State Education Department, Curriculum Support Officer)

Aboriginal English plays an important role in maintaining and strengthening Aboriginal identity. Eades (1993) reported that sometimes there is confusion between Standard Australian English

and Aboriginal English and teachers misjudge the language competency of the Aboriginal students.

Almost all the people we spoke with agreed that the **presence of Indigenous adults in the school** promoted positive self-identity among Indigenous students. Groome and Hamilton (1995) regard the employment of Aboriginal education workers and teachers as essential in the establishment of schools that are culturally aware. **AIEWs** were seen to be particularly important in this respect because students felt that they were people who they could relate to and who understood them better than the non-Indigenous teachers. The AIEWs provided welcoming home rooms, and liaised between the students, the teachers, and the parents. Students in schools with low numbers of Indigenous students felt disadvantaged by not having an AIEW; they felt that it should not need an enrolment of 30 or more to have one.

Some schools actively promoted the continued **contribution of students who had graduated** and gone on to develop successful careers elsewhere. In these cases, the current students said they were inspired by the talks that these local Indigenous people sometimes gave at school, and they felt motivated to follow in their footsteps.

If the **ASSPA** Program had a high profile in the school, invariably there was a strong sense of the valuing of Indigenous cultures by the non-Indigenous students and teachers, and a strong sense of positive self-identity by the Indigenous students.

> *A good ASSPA program committee in the school boosts the kids, as does parental involvement in activities such as NAIDOC week.*
> (ASSPA program committee member, urban primary school)

The **Indigenous peer group** influenced how Indigenous students viewed and felt about themselves at school. There were mixed views about whether students were more likely to have positive self-identities as Indigenous people in schools with large numbers of Indigenous students or in those with small numbers. In general, the students spoke positively about having a sizeable group of Indigenous students with whom to identify in the school.

> *The good thing here is that there are lots of Nyungars . . . We all stick in a bunch, all us Nyungars. It's wicked being a Nyungar. We stick together. If you get hurt, they all come and help . . . You feel good with your cousins.*
> (Student, urban high school)

Groome and Edwardson (1996) found in their study with urban Aboriginal adolescents that, although peers were not referred to as being significant in their identity development, relationships with peers nevertheless appeared to be important for many young people. Groome (1995) noted that Aboriginal adolescents identify with their peers through use of Aboriginal English and by wearing "the (Aboriginal) colours". On the other hand, some students and parents in the current study, spoke of the problems of not mixing with non-Indigenous students, of sticking within a group.

> *If classes or schools are all Aboriginal, how will kids mix when they get out in the world?*

School systems

The powerful influence on self-identity of individual teachers was complemented by the **influence of the total school system** within which students experienced their education. The

broader school philosophy, structures, and school-wide systems (for example class groupings, homework centres, behaviour management programs, ways of dealing with racism, inclusive policies and actions) were influential factors frequently mentioned by students, parents, and teachers.

The importance of the total school **climate** in promoting positive outcomes for Indigenous students was mentioned frequently by participants in the current study. For instance, in one primary school, promoted by the Principal as a welcoming place, the parents spoke about the nurturing environment of the school in this way:

> *Our children gain so much from the caring Primary School environment, where we are part of the school community. We all benefit from the support of the Aboriginal Education Resource Centre . . . the community emphasis and the selection of appropriate literature.*

Hudspith and Williams (1994) contend that it is up to the teachers to let Aboriginal children know they are valued and to recognise their work and potential. They suggest that this can be achieved by building positive affiliative relationships with students and facilitating positive relations between students. In the current study it was apparent that many primary schools, in particular, worked hard to accomplish this. However, some parents/carers and teachers were concerned about the effects on children of the transition to what was perceived to be the more impersonal environment of the high school.

The existence of **homework centres** was seen by many as important in helping students to develop an image of themselves as successful students. Although homework centres were in existence long before the introduction of ASSPA program committees, they are now generally the initiative of ASSPA groups. When adequate facilities were provided by the school and when teachers as well as parents contributed their time after school, the success of the centres was even more marked. Government initiatives, such as Homework Centres and ABSTUDY, have sought to address the high attrition rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Byrne, Buchanan, Grant and Beyers (1997) reported that during the period from 1989 to 1993, there was a slight increase in participation by Indigenous students in secondary and tertiary education that could be attributed to such initiatives.

The ways in which **classes are grouped** was also seen by some people to be an important factor in the development of a positive image of oneself as a student. Several schools had a flexible grouping arrangement whereby it was easier for teachers to provide work appropriate to students' needs and levels of attainment than it was in the more standard single or combined grade system of classes. For instance, one school had grouped classes thus: 1/2, 2/3/4, 3/4/5, 4/5/6, 5/6/7, 6/7. In terms of classroom groupings, it has been noted that adolescent males who had undergone initiation rites within their community were sometimes inappropriately grouped in classes with female students taught by female teachers, thereby reducing the likelihood of continued attachment to school.

Groome and Edwardson (1996) found that Aboriginal students commented positively on the prospect of an Aboriginal **resource room** and that most Aboriginal students preferred being grouped together in classes of approximately 26 students. In one Australian school an Aboriginal resource room was established with the aim of specifically increasing the self-esteem of Aboriginal students (Byrne, Buchanan, Grant, & Beyers, 1997)). The contention was that the resource room would be a place to which the Aboriginal students could retreat and thus gain a sense of belonging. Many schools in the current study had set up similar rooms for Indigenous students and these places were generally highly valued by them.

The curriculum

The most significant aspect of a school's **curriculum** in relation to the promotion of a positive sense of self as an Indigenous person concerned the teaching of **Indigenous studies** and **languages**. In general, there was agreement that all school students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) should be involved in such programs as part of the compulsory school curriculum. While there were some conflicting views about the content of such programs, how they should be taught, and who should teach them, the consensus seemed to be that Indigenous studies programs should be taught by Indigenous people. However, there was also concern expressed about the involvement of people who were not teachers in such programs because there was the possibility of unreliability of presentation (people not turning up, or not feeling comfortable in the context of the school). In New South Wales, Aboriginal studies has been introduced in high schools as a means of promoting self-identity among Indigenous students (Herbert, Anderson, Price & Stehbens, 1998). The Board of Studies also promotes an Aboriginal perspectives approach to syllabus design and content so that Aboriginal knowledge is more pervasive throughout all subjects. In the current study, one parent (who was also an AIEW) thought that Indigenous studies programs for preservice and inservice teachers should be taught by Aboriginal people, and the content should include Aboriginal history, communications, kinships, roles within the family, child rearing practices, and ways of teaching and learning.

It has been suggested that child-rearing practices in Indigenous cultures need to be taken into account in the development of school curricula and in pedagogical practice. For example, West (1994) proposed that Aboriginal children are usually brought up with a degree of independence that involves learning to choose when to be involved in activities; they are not always controlled by others and will learn when they are not pushed or forced to learn. Aboriginal children are often given social equality by adults, they are not expected to comply immediately with adult requests, and one Aboriginal cultural method of control is indirectness and circumspection. Some aspects of Aboriginal cultures may be problematic for students in formal learning situations where the teacher is in control and where students are expected to comply immediately. Hughes (1987) described aspects of Aboriginal cultural influences on learning as they contrasted with expectations of Australian education systems. These included spontaneity, repetition, and preference for the listener role as opposed to non-Aboriginal learning characteristics concerned with structure, inquiry and verbalisation. However, care needs to be taken in making generalisations about child rearing practices that might impinge upon learning in school settings because there is much variation among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in terms of how children are reared.

Language issues in relation to the school curriculum and self-identity have been discussed widely in the literature, and were frequently commented on by many of the participants in the current study. The importance of one's language in the development and maintenance of a strong cultural identity has already been noted. In this respect, a number of schools in the current study taught local Indigenous languages, but these programs were dependent on the availability of suitable people. Most people believed that it was important to maintain Indigenous languages because "*so many stories had already been lost*". In situations in which English was a second language, particularly in the early years of schooling, there were sometimes circumstances in which students needed "*someone to explain things in their own language*." This underscores the important role of Indigenous teacher aides in this respect; it also highlights the need to place trained ESL teachers in classrooms, particularly in the early grades, where there are children whose first language is not English.

In relation to **bilingual education** programs in the Northern Territory, it was argued strongly that they needed to be retained but they need to be made more effective by rigorously teaching English earlier than is currently being done. It was also argued that bilingual programs should be taught by trained bilingual teachers. Bilingual education programs have been attributed with improving relations between schools and Indigenous communities, improving self-confidence among Indigenous children, and improving learning outcomes. Malcolm (1998) maintains that support of Indigenous languages is support of Indigenous identity. He believes that the more teachers learn about Indigenous students' use of languages, the more informed they will be about how Indigenous people construct themselves. Eades (1993) considers that "respecting, valuing and understanding Aboriginal ways of using English is a significant step in respecting, valuing and understanding the identity and self-esteem of these children" (p. 5).

 "**Alternative" programs** were developed in some schools in the current study to counter the negative attitudes that so many Indigenous students had to "academic" programs of study. In one school in which an alternative program had been introduced to address the issue of poor educational outcomes for Koori students over the years, a Koori Cultural Officer commented that

> *. . . attendance and self-esteem have improved. The school gives the community an identity. Before this school, the kids felt good about themselves through the family, but they had a lot of negative stuff from the general community. Now self-identity is pretty good . . . The kids are feeling safe, strong and secure in what they are doing . . . Info tech, web site, kids' input, make multimedia, local traditional stories, again helps with self-identity.*

Schools in which there was a strong focus on **vocational education** were seen frequently to be offering programs of greater relevance to students who had histories of absenteeism and failure but who had been encouraged to remain at school. In a study by Beresford (1993) it was concluded that the focus on academic courses and skills in schools rather than on practical or life skills contributed to the high attrition rate of Aboriginal students. The emphasis on the development of practical skills such as cooking, woodwork, carpentry, sewing, mechanics, and agriculture was seen by the participants in the current study to lead to greater career opportunities for students. The range of work experience opportunities available to students, and their preparation for successful entry into the workforce also was highly valued as a way of promoting a positive self-identity within the context of the school.

In the current study, schools differed in the degree to which they promoted **Indigenous cultural activities**. Two types of activity could be differentiated—those directly linked to the broad cultural ethos of Indigenous people in Australia, and the more specific activities linked to the culture of the local Indigenous community (as in remote communities with specific forms of painting, dance, bush food, hunting, and so on).

In some schools, the only noticeable cultural activities occurred during NAIDOC week. Students in urban schools said they felt proud of their Indigenous identity when non-Indigenous people within the school were supportive of the activities and events that are organised during NAIDOC week. Fotiadis (1995) describes culture as a complex mix of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional factors that characterise a society. It is possible that the pride that was evidenced by students in their Indigenous culture is reflective of the recognition by others that their culture matters. This underlines the importance of Indigenous cultural celebrations such as NAIDOC week. Unfortunately, for some students, the event went unnoticed in their schools.

I didn't even notice NAIDOC week here. I just forgot about it because no one did anything.

16

Some schools actively promoted Indigenous cultures in other ways. For example, in one urban high school the ASSPA Program group had erected a 'Hall of Fame' in which the achievements of local Aboriginal people were exhibited and promoted. Some schools had Indigenous art in prominent positions around the school (for example, as murals on school buildings), or had the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags flying. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance groups existed in some schools and these were a particular source of pride for most students. Some groups had travelled within states, nationally, and internationally and had achieved considerable recognition at competitions.

Although it is important that culture is taught within the home, Ramsay, Vold and Williams (1989) maintain that ethnic identity should be fostered by means of a multicultural education that makes all individuals sensitive to ethnic and racial differences and also increases individuals' awareness of their race and culture. Carter and Goodwin (1994) propose that curricula must change to become culturally responsive. They believe that teachers must become informed about their students' cultural beliefs and customs, and they must be understanding and acknowledge minority students' ways of learning. They suggest also that parents and community members should participate in school events. The implementation of such measures will serve to foster the development of positive self-identity for Indigenous cultural groups.

The home/community

The **family** and/or the particular **Indigenous group** to which young people belong has a profound influence on both how they think about themselves as Indigenous people and how they perceive themselves as school students. For the students in the current study, the **home/community influences** were linked mainly to young people's exposure to specific Indigenous cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices; the sorts of role models to whom they were exposed; and the extent to which education was both valued and supported.

When Groome and Edwardson (1996) spoke with urban Aboriginal parents, they found that parents stressed cultural knowledge to their children so that they would know who they were and who their people were. The parents placed emphasis on the role that the family played in formation of a sense of identity. In speaking with Aboriginal secondary students in Adelaide, Groome and Edwardson found that the most important people in the students' lives were their mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, and members of their extended families.

Similarly, in the current study, students reported that, in terms of identity as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, it was generally in the context of the home that they heard the stories and learned the skills associated with their culture. Some students regretted that they could not understand their parents or other community adults when they spoke their language or some words and phrases from it. Some students said their parents or grandparents tried to teach them.

> *I have a big chart on the fridge with Nyungar words. I also have a T-shirt with words on it.*
>   (Student, urban primary school)

Some communities have maintained aspects of their traditional lifestyles, and links with the land and the sea, such as the strong link with the sea in the Torres Strait Islands where fishing and related activities are still of major importance. This is in keeping with the observation by Synott and Whatman (1998) that the islands and waters of the Torres Strait unite the Islanders through spiritual bonds. In the current study, young Torres Strait Islander students spoke with great pride about this aspect of their culture.

We know how to catch crabs . . . white people catch crabs with a scoop . . . we do it with our hands . . . our dads teach us.

In other places, however, there were comments that indicated less of an identification with traditional Indigenous cultures. For example, when asked if Nunga students at one rural high school keep in touch with their culture, an AIEW explained that

. . . some families keep it . . . go hunting with the father. . . but some has been lost as the result of interacting with the white man's world. Some parents won't teach Aboriginal culture because their children have to live in a white man's world.

Role models are essential within the family, as it is from them that children learn adult roles. In the current study, students frequently mentioned **family** or **community members** as the people who they most admired or respected. Generally, students derived their Indigenous identities from their parents and grandparents and they said they felt proud of this and valued the stories they heard within the family about their past. As students reported admiration and respect for family and community members, it would seem essential that they play a greater role in schools. Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington and Richer (1999) advocated extending parental and community knowledge to schools so that students can maintain a positive sense of self as Indigenous people. Further, they believe that this allows a two-way exchange of knowledge and the development of an understanding of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. It may also reduce the conflict that some students experience between home and school lives.

Groome and Edwardson (1996) found that Aboriginal high school students identified strongly with Aboriginal sports identities; they regarded them as positive role models. Most students in the current study had strong and positive feelings about their abilities in a range of sports, and they actively promoted this aspect of themselves among both their Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers. Many of the boys aspired to careers in sports such as football, basketball, soccer, and boxing and many identified as, and with, sports people. This dimension of identity was strongly influenced by opportunities to develop sporting skills within the school, and the availability and promotion of sporting identities as role models. For many students the most valued aspect of school was the opportunity to be involved in sporting teams. Excellence in sport was a particular hallmark of the Indigenous group of students in most schools. Indigenous sporting identities, such as footballers and boxers were frequently mentioned as people to be admired by the students in the current study, especially by the boys; to a lesser extent black non-Australian athletes such as Tiger Woods were also mentioned. Less frequently mentioned were non-sporting Indigenous identities such as Mick Dodson, Gatjil Djerrkura, Galarrway Yunupingu, and Ernie Dingo, although some students had never heard of these people.

The only other role models mentioned with any regularity were AIEWs or Indigenous teachers, who were seen both as people to look up to and respect, and people who could be counted on to care for and understand students.

Negative Influences on Self-Identity

When Groome and Edwardson (1996) spoke with Aboriginal secondary school students, they found that students had experienced difficulties with teachers who did not understand them, respect their cultures, or relate to them positively. Similarly, in terms of how young Indigenous people in the current study saw themselves as students within the classroom, the perceived **attitudes and behaviours of the teachers** were of paramount importance. Some students thought that, when compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts, they were treated unfairly. They

18

questioned whether the expectations of the teachers were the same for all students, whether they treated all students equally, or whether they favoured some students more than others.

> *There are some mean teachers. They let you down because of the colour of your skin. They help the Wadjelas more. They pick on us—that's why some Nyungars don't come to school. One teacher called my brother a 'black boong' but it was my brother who got suspended when he swore at him for calling him that.*
> (Urban high school student)

Some students thought that they were given work that was too easy for them "*just because they were Aboriginal*." One high school student commented that the teachers "*help us more . . . sit next to us like we're dumb or something*." Reaburn (1993) noted that teacher expectations were lowered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and this marginalises their participation. However, a number of teachers insisted that they had the same expectations for all students, and that when students were not "*performing to their potential*", they were concerned to know why. The problem seemed to be that for some teachers the answer to why students were not "*performing*" was because of circumstances within the home; the response of such teachers was to "*back off*" so that extra pressure was not placed on students.

There was a culture among many students of "**anti-intellectualism**", of doing well in school as being of little value or something to be ashamed of. Even students whose teachers described them as very academically able did not always feel good about themselves as students. This negative sense of self as a student was probably accentuated for many by the views of parents/carers who do not think school is that important, and who openly tell their children that

> *School never did me any good.*
> (as reported by an AIEW)

This aspect of negative identification within groups of Aboriginal students is also reported in the literature. For example Groome and Hamilton (1995) found that some Aboriginal adolescents view their counterparts who do well at school as "white fellas" and discourage them from persisting with an education.

Systems of **discipline** in some schools had a negative impact on the identities of some students. Although these systems had supposedly been devised to deal with all students, Indigenous students frequently said that they bore the brunt of the punishments. In terms of disciplinary measures, it was not uncommon to hear comments about the inappropriateness of some of the measures used, particularly in relation to suspension.

> *. . . there are a lot of kids in Years 9 and 10 who did not learn to read and write in primary school because they didn't attend enough. They still stay away. Many of them get suspended for minor things like swearing at the teachers, but that doesn't help. They should be made to be suspended at school, and supervised.*
> (AIEW, rural High School).

In one high school (with an almost exclusively Indigenous student population), students commented on the decrease in discipline in the school; this comment was echoed by parents at the P & C meeting.

> *One bad thing about school is that they are not as strict as before, so school now is a place just to muck around. There are new laws and regulations, a different generation . . . it's too*

much like the US with everyone suing everyone. The kids can just say "You're abusing me."
or "You're being racist." There are too many laws governing the school environment.
Students can walk out of the classroom.
 (Year 11 student).

It was a big mistake to take away corporal punishment . . . the worst students can expect now
is expulsion . . . If there are no set of controls, everyone runs amuck.
 (Parent)

Discipline policies that conflict with child rearing practices in Indigenous communities have been associated with poor educational performance (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991).

Racial taunting by non-Indigenous peers also influences how students feel about themselves. Groome and Edwardson (1996) found in their study with urban Aboriginal adolescents that students sometimes experience rejection from their non-Indigenous peers on the basis of racism. They develop different ways of dealing with racism including ignoring the racial taunts and getting on with their schooling, finding solace in their own racial group, or defending themselves in a physical way–but this can lead to increased difficulties at school.

For the students in the current study, sometimes it was not the racial comments themselves that were negative in their impact; rather, it was the way in which the school dealt with such incidents that impacted on students more strongly. Although many students said they tried to ignore racist comments, this was not always possible, and like the students with whom Groome and Edwardson (1996) spoke, when they responded negatively, they felt that they invariably were the ones who were punished. This is explained by one parent thus:

There has to be strong administration at the top to stop the racial taunting. Mostly the
Nyungars get blamed when there is trouble but often trouble starts because the white kids
call our kids racist names.
(Parent, urban high school)

Additionally, many students spoke of racist experiences within the **general Australian community**. Many seemed to expect that people would be suspicious of them just because they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

When you go shopping, they think you are going to steal something just because you are
black.
(Student, urban high school)

A small number of students had had negative experiences in their part-time jobs, where they felt they were not well treated by their supervisors. Students had also witnessed the difficulties of some older siblings and family members in their search for employment.

Some students who felt they and their friends had "worked against the odds" and had remained to finish secondary schooling, perceived the potential to be influenced negatively by some of their less academically successful **peers**.

At School X, there are not positive feelings . . . it would drag us down there. Too many kids
drink alcohol and take drugs and stuff. Lots of them wag school. . . they just waste all their
opportunities . . . they've given up, they have no role models except their brothers.

Girls my age are having babies . . . I think the big thing with boys is drugs and alcohol.
 (Students, regional high school)

Students seem to see that identifying strongly as Aboriginal will clash with their peer culture, unless it can be seen as 'being cool'.
 (Teacher, urban secondary school)

Some students appeared to experience another threat to their identities that also came from within their Indigenous peer group. It was noted that teasing often occurs between students from different Indigenous cultural groups. For instance, one primary school teacher commented that

You often find that racial teasing is between the Aboriginal children themselves rather than between the Aboriginal and white children. It's sort of a race thing.

On the other hand, it must be noted that teasing among students can be a used as a way of strengthening one's cultural identity, of bonding with the group. For instance, when one urban primary school student commented that "We tease each other...but we don't mean it us black kids" the implication was that there was a sense of togetherness created by such teasing.

The final negative peer influence was related to the reported rejection by some Indigenous students of their peers who were too "white", either in appearance or in the visible signs of how they lived at home (for example relatively affluent, educated parents), or because of the high academic aspirations they held.

There were many comments from students, teachers, AIEWs, and parents concerning the **negative role models** within Indigenous families and communities. Such models were seen as serious barriers to the development of positive self-identity for young people. Most students were aware of the negative image associated with the violence and neglect resulting from substance use within their communities. For some students this created obvious distress because of the mixed allegiances they had to their parents and other community members on the one hand, and on the other to a dream they had of a better future for themselves . . . *"I don't want to be like any of them."*

When asked what they would wish for if they had one wish, some students said such things as

Smash down the pub . . . it wastes money . . . so does gambling.

Fix up the community . . . it's a mess. Get rid of the pubs.

Stop the violence, the fighting. Stop the drinking.

Home environments that were not conducive to study were evident in the current study. For some students, the physical and social context of the home often made it difficult to meet the requirements placed on them by the school. For instance, the completion of homework for some students was difficult because of conflicting family demands and the lack of a suitable space in which to work.

At home I can't do my homework. I'm too busy with sport and doing things with the family. I can't do my projects at home—all my cousins come and they rip up my work.
 (Student, urban primary school)

The influence of family was also apparent when some Indigenous students did not attend school. Those who did attend felt that some of their friends were often absent because their families did not value education or because these students did not feel that their Indigenous identity had been valued at school. Sometimes education appears to be valued highly within the home as "*a way forward*"; on the other hand, in some homes there is a devaluing of education because "*it never got me anywhere*". In the words of one student

> *Some students are absent because their parents don't care. They are at the TAB.*

Other reasons for disruption to school participation were attributed to family responsibilities (for example, when students must attend a funeral, or when they are required to help mind younger siblings or cousins, or attend to other 'family business'). In many instances these responsibilities conflict with school expectations such as completing homework, being punctual and attending school on a daily basis thereby making it difficult for students and teachers to pursue learning programs that depend on the sequential development of skills and their regular practice.

Parents and AIEWs frequently suggested that when students behaved badly at school, there was often trouble at home. They described situations of abuse, alcohol, drugs, and deprivation; but they also talked about the strength of family members and the support of extended families to "*help keep the children doing the right thing.*"

> *There's lots of families working really hard towards their kids' education, then there's a big gap in the middle, then lots are not being responsible. . . . The kids need a safe and healthy community . . . abuse has been tolerated for so long . . . it seems like part of the culture, but some are now saying "Hey, no it's not." And the kids . . . there would be 5 out of 20 Year 7s who are into cones and alcohol. You don't get mainstream outcomes with these sort of social problems.*

Some parents spoke of the effects of being members of the stolen generation. They felt that many parents lacked self-esteem and adequate parenting skills, and these inadequacies were being passed on to their children. On the other hand, many parents and AIEWs commented that they had much to be proud of within their culture, and this pride should be promoted more among all community members.

> *Some Nyungar parents need to be educated about being proud to be a Nyungar so that they can then teach their kids to be proud.*
> (AIEW, urban primary school)

Many teachers, AIEWs and parents believe that to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students there must be a greater focus on the parents rather than on the students because it is the parents who will have the greatest effect on attendance. It was suggested that this may be achieved by holding workshops in the communities to promote an understanding of the importance of education and the way in which schools worked to achieve positive outcomes for their students.

Given the negative influences on the development of a positive self-identity, both as an Indigenous person and as a successful student within the Australian school system, it is not surprising that some Indigenous young people become alienated from school and the broader society. Another possible explanation for the alienation from schools of many Indigenous youth in Australia relates to the concept of disidentification which has been used to explain the marked alienation of many young African American males from the education system in America. According to Steele (1992), disidentification occurs when there is no relationship between one's

22

academic self-esteem and one's global self-esteem. Steele agues that students who do not identify with school or academic pursuits experience lower motivation to succeed because there is no contingency between academic outcomes and self-esteem–good performance is not rewarding, and poor performance is not punishing. Thus, there are no compelling incentives to expend effort in school-related endeavours.

Steele further argues that although students initially may experience some anxiety over possible failure in academic settings, individuals who are members of disadvantaged groups also experience the increased anxiety of confirming a negative group stereotype (e.g., of being less academically able) through personal failure. Accordingly, members of stigmatised groups are at greater risk of disidentification as a protective strategy than are members of the general population; disidentification is a group-level response to stigma, rather than a response to poor performance. The result is that even though people from marginalised or stigmatised groups know others of their group with more education tend to get better jobs, they reject this path because they feel they are forced to act "White" and because they see individuals in their social networks not being rewarded for putting significant energies into schooling (Ogbu, 1988). Steele (1992) has also discussed the idea that marginalised groups rebel at the idea of being assimilated into an institution that has made them invisible.

For Indigenous Australian youth, the concept of disidentification has implications for students who feel that the only way they can succeed in school is to subjugate their Indigenous identity and act like a "white fella" by conforming to the prevailing academic expectations. The anti-intellectualism evident among some Indigenous students may be an attempt to lessen their invisibility as a cultural group or to assert an identity that is different from a perceived "white fella' identity.

In many instances, however, students in the current study were able to reconcile their Indigenous identities with participation at school. Many students both commented with pride on their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity *and* indicated that they liked school. For instance, one young student from an urban primary school who said that it felt good to be Aboriginal also said

> *. . . I like to learn stuff. I like to learn to read, my sums, but it's just hard that you can't do some stuff hey? I like homework 'cos when I take it home, Nan and Pop always help me.*

Another typical example of the successful integration of cultural identity and identity as a student is given by a Year 6 student from a rural school who said that

> *. . . it is good being an Aboriginal at this school . . because I'm proud of my culture, our colour, the flag. I'm proud about who I am. I like it at school 'cos of all my friends. I like coming to school because of the teachers. They teach you and we learn stuff about different cultures and different people. Teachers are fair, they look after you, make sure you don't get hurt. Make you proud through all of your art and stuff.*

Thus, although for some Indigenous Australians culture and schooling come into conflict to the detriment of one or the other, many young people either do not experience conflict or else find ways of dealing successfully with incongruent influences. We do not have sufficient data to be able to tease apart the reasons why the experiences and responses of students are different in this respect. Certainly greater involvement by Indigenous people in the formulation and presentation of school curricula would help to make schooling less of a "white fella" endeavour. The

development of an "Indigenous intellectualism" through greater exploration and promotion of Indigenous ways of thinking and acting may help young Indigenous people see more of a connection between their own efforts at school and the collective well-being of their group or community.

Top

Question 4: What is the relative importance of factors that contribute to the development of positive self-identity for Indigenous young people?

> The most important factor in the development and maintenance of a positive self-identity for Indigenous students in both school and home contexts is the attitude and behaviour of significant others.
>
> Within the home, parents/carers and grandparents are especially influential. Within the school, teachers have most impact on the development of positive self-identity. Other important influences include:
>
> - AIEWs
> - Indigenous community members and groups;
> - ASSPA groups and Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups;
> - role models (especially Indigenous sporting identities);
> - peers;
> - school systems and curricula such as class groupings, homework centres, Indigenous languages, and vocational education opportunities; and
> - opportunities to engage in cultural activities

It is difficult to determine the relative importance of factors that influence the development of positive self-identity among Indigenous students. In the previous section, we outlined a range of factors that influenced both identity as an Indigenous person and identity as a student—both crucial to the achievement of successful school outcomes for Indigenous students. Despite the difficulty of creating a hierarchy of factors, findings from the current study clearly indicate that the influence of a range of individual **people** (as opposed to systems, structures, and groups) is of most importance.

Important influences on the formation of an overall Indigenous identity that have been documented include Aboriginal social organisation and connectedness with other Aboriginal people (Forrest, 1998), family and extended family (Partington, 1998), language (Phillips, 1992) and peers (Groome & Edwardson, 1996). The importance of teachers in assisting students to develop well-rounded and positive conceptions of who they are has also been well-documented; teachers' personal qualities and pedagogical skills exert considerable influence on the self-perceptions of students.

Participants in the current study most frequently mentioned **family members**, including parents and grandparents, as the ones most admired or respected; to a lesser extent they mentioned **Indigenous community members** as being important influences in their lives. Generally, students derived their Indigenous identities from their parents and grandparents and they said they felt proud of this and valued the stories they heard within the family about their past. Groome and Edwardson (1996) found that Aboriginal parents stressed cultural knowledge to their

children so they would know who they were and who their people were. The family or Indigenous group to which young people belonged influenced not only how they thought about themselves as Indigenous people but also how they perceived themselves as school students. The value that parents/carers placed on education and the degree to which they supported their children in school-related pursuits influenced the extent to which students themselves valued their learning experiences at school.

Within the school context, the **teachers** were the most important contributors to the development of a positive sense of self, both as a student and as a member of an Indigenous cultural group. It was also evident that positive self-identity was promoted by **school principals** when they exhibited a genuine concern, created a nurturing environment, promoted the school as a place for *all* students, and when creative planning and effort went in to developing appropriate programs for the Indigenous students. Students were also influenced by the number of their **peers**, that is other Indigenous students**,** in the school with larger numbers reflecting stronger identification as an Indigenous person.

Other significant factors in the school environment were the employment of **AIEWs** and the involvement of **ASSPA** program committees and Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (local and State). Almost all the people who were interviewed in the study agreed that the presence of Indigenous adults in the school including AIEWs, promoted positive self-identity among Indigenous students. The AIEWs were seen as people who the students could relate to, who understood the students, and most importantly, who acted as a liaison between students, teachers and parents. A high profile ASSPA program committee in the school invariably meant there was a strong sense of valuing of Indigenous cultures and a strong sense of positive self-identity by Indigenous students. Some stated that the way **classes were grouped** was important; some schools had flexible groupings where teachers could cater to ability levels rather than ages of students. **Homework centres** helped some students to develop an image of themselves as successful students. Promoting success in Indigenous students also occurred in some schools when there was active encouragement of **past Indigenous students,** who had graduated and gone on to develop successful careers elsewhere, to talk with the students. Additionally, supporting Indigenous **cultural activities** within the school made some students feel proud of their identity, as did the teaching of appropriate **Indigenous languages**. Language is a source of pride and identity for many Indigenous Australians; it is regarded as being significant in the formation and maintenance of one's cultural identity (Phillips, 1992).

In many instances, positive influences on self-identity came from the students themselves, particularly in the area of **sporting achievement**. One school fostered the success of their football team, which was comprised of mostly Indigenous students, within the school in general. Other students experienced success at sport individually and identified *as* sports people while others identified *with* sports people. This dimension of identity was strongly influenced by opportunities to develop sporting skills within the school, and the availability and promotion of sporting identities as role models.

Schools in which there was a strong focus on vocational education were seen frequently to be offering programs of greater relevance to students and this impacted on their self-identity in a positive manner. The range of work experience opportunities available to students, and their preparation for successful entry to the workforce was also highly valued as a way of promoting a positive self-identity within the context of the school.

It should be noted that Indigenous students did not view positive self-identity as an important consideration in their lives. It is not common, particularly in remote communities, for Indigenous

people to be self-reflective—they would not normally engage in discussion of "who you are". In this respect, many of the Indigenous students were unprepared for the issues raised in the consultations; however, they could readily describe what was important to them, what they wanted to be or do in the future, and other such things that are indicators of how one perceives oneself.

Top

Question 5: To what extent does positive self-identity vary with context? For example do some young people have a positive self-identity at home and a negative self-identity at school?

> There was evidence that positive self-identity was influenced by context for the Indigenous students. In some instances this was dependent upon the presence of other Indigenous students. Different dimensions of students' identities also appeared to be contextually based; however, the different dimensions did not always appear to be clearly related.

The findings from studies that have focused on the salience of contextual factors in influencing one's identity (see Pederson, 1994) suggest that aspects of self-identity may vary according to situational factors. For example, this is evidenced in the use of terms such as "social self" (used to describe behaviours that result from comparisons of similarity of self with others) and "private self" (used to describe behaviours based on comparisons of dissimilarity of self with others) (Jourard, 1974). Purdie and Hattie (1995) conducted research that revealed contextual aspects to identity. They noted that people can have a positive conception of themselves in relation to their peers but they may have a negative perception of themselves in relation to their parents or in their mathematics class. Four contextual domains that influence identity formation are proposed by Grotevant (1987) as culture and society, family, peers, and school and work environments.

For Indigenous Australian students in the current study, the different dimensions of students' identities were more or less salient according to the contexts in which they found themselves. For instance, in schools in which there were high numbers of Indigenous students, identification as an Indigenous person was more strongly expressed than in schools with low numbers of Indigenous students. Compare, for instance the comments made by two students—the first in a suburban high school with 105 Indigenous students (A), and the second in a suburban high school with only eight Indigenous students (B).

> (A) *It's wicked[3] being a Nyungar. We stick together at school; if you get hurt, they come and help you. You feel good with your cousins, but it's harder when there are just a few of you.*

> (B) *Comments are not often made about us being Aboriginal. Most people don't know that we are Aboriginal. Some of my mates say "That's another Abo thing you are going to" and rib me about it a bit, but it's not nasty and doesn't upset me at all. I don't really identify with any of the Aboriginal things around the school, don't know much about it . . . .Last year, ASSPA sponsored an Art program in the school. That was good and we all got to learn a bit about Aboriginal things. There's an Aboriginal Homework Centre at*

---

[3] Good, great, wonderful.

the school, but not many people go—mainly primary school kids. Each year, there is a Kath Walker Award for an Aboriginal student, but I don't know much about it.

It was also evident that when students are from communities where there is a strong sense of a particular Indigenous identity, they often have to reassess what this means when they pursue their schooling in another place. The following extract from one teacher in an all-Indigenous high school in a large city is reflective of the contextual nature of identity for some students.

The majority of students here come from traditional backgrounds. If they are here for long periods, they learn to walk with one foot in each world. Conflict is experienced by being in this environment, compared to back home.

There is conflicting theoretical and empirical evidence in the literature regarding the stability of self constructs such as self-concept, self-esteem, and self-identity. That some Indigenous students reassess their identities as they move from one context in to another is supportive of the view that the stability of self-concept is dependent on the consistency of the social environment (Gergen, 1982; Abrams, 1999). Hattie (1992) argues that this view is too simplistic as there are marked individual differences. He contends that people "who have a low internal locus of control or those who cannot tolerate much self-complexity are more likely to have self-concepts that are dependent on the situation than are those who have a high internal locus of control or high tolerance of complexity" (p.115).

Perhaps of particular relevance to an understanding of the effect of context on the identities of Indigenous children is Gergen's contention that self-concept can change because of others' social appraisals, and social comparisons. That is, it may well be that some Indigenous children feel good about particular aspects of themselves at home, but negative experiences in other contexts (e.g., the school, the town or suburb in which they live) result in them feeling less positive about those dimensions of self. What is important in this respect is the view, supported by empirical findings, that people can and do exert considerable choice and influence on their own identities—individuals can actively choose, alter, and modify their identities based on what will enable them to get along best in a given context (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). The challenge for teachers in this respect is twofold: to help Indigenous students recognise the element of choice they have in exerting control over the various aspects of their identities so they are not at the whim of the social appraisals of others; and to create environments in which students feel supported to do this, particularly in the early years of schooling when they are developing patterns of responding which become harder to change as they grow older.

If it is the case that negative experiences at school, or experiences of racism in the community have coloured all the experiences of some Indigenous students (we have no data to support this notion, but it is a feasibility), then it is important to support students to define themselves positively (though perhaps differently) in each of the contexts in which they operate.

Findings from the current study indicated that different dimensions of some students' identities were contextually based and did not always appear to be positively related. That is, some students had positive identities of themselves as Indigenous people but had a low regard for themselves as students. This multidimensional facet of identity was described by Baumeister and Muraven (1996) as a set of meaningful definitions ascribed or attached to the self. In cases of high rates of absenteeism for Indigenous students, there is a negative link between the dimensions of identity as an Indigenous person and as a student. Sometimes this is because the families of absent students did not value education (the parents' experiences had been so negative and did not seem

to have advantaged them in any way); also many of the absent students did not feel that their Indigenous identity had been valued at school; others felt they had been "pushed out". Hence, a cycle of absenteeism is set in place and the low image of self as student is compounded by low levels of achievement—students miss so much work and are therefore not able to advance in areas that are dependent on the sequential development of skills and the regular practising of those skills.

Top

Question 6: Does self-identity in young Indigenous people vary in relation to geographical factors?

Although there was a strong sense of allegiance to a general Indigenous identity by most of the students (evident, for example, when they referred to such things as the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags, Indigenous role models, and their recent history in relation to contact with non-Indigenous people), the concept of 'pan-Aboriginality', whereby Indigenous Australians have often been referred to as a single entity, was not a reality in the various settings in which interviews and focus groups were conducted. Through their responses, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people demonstrated their individuality within the specific social and cultural sub-groups of which they are members.

There was evidence of unique features of Indigenous cultures that were relative to location according to remote, regional and urban areas. These included strength of cultural identity, language group, and career aspirations. At the same time there were commonalities across regions that can be attributed to Indigenous Australian identity (such as importance of family and place). The most critical implications for urban schools include the need for placing value on Indigenous identity, having Indigenous resources and activities, and including an Indigenous perspective where appropriate across the curriculum. Implications for remote schools include the need for programs to address career prospects.

Much has been written about differences between and within cultural groups in terms of how they perceive themselves. For instance, there is a vast body of literature concerning the perceived collective/interdependent distinction between cultural groups (for example, Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sunar, 1998; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). In collectivist (mostly non-Western) cultures, self-conceptions stress interrelatedness with others. In individualistic (mostly Western) cultures, conceptions that focus on "I", autonomy, emotional independence, and egocentricism are emphasised. More recently, however, some researchers have questioned whether collectivism and individualism are at opposite ends of a single continuum—that is, that people are either predominantly collectivist in their understanding of self or predominantly individualistic in that view. More likely, individualism and collectivism are separate constructs, and people can incorporate elements of both in their understanding of self in relation to others (Kashima, Kashima, & Hardie, 1998).

Similarly, there is literature that characterises Indigenous cultures in particular ways. For instance, traditional Maori identity is explained as deriving from membership within a family structure in which cultural practices such as language, customs, kinship obligations, spiritual beliefs and traditions were learnt (Moekke-Pickering, 1996). Maori identity also involves an affinity to the land, as tribal locations have been intrinsic to the identity of Maori people. Karetu (1990) depicted Maori identity as having less to do with "blood quantum" (or physiological

characteristics) and more to do with the upbringing one experienced and the society in which one grew up. However, other forces (such as changing demographic patterns, economic conditions, and technological advancements that have resulted from settlement of a forceful and dominant white culture) have impacted upon Maori identity.

In Australia, the cultures of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people have also been depicted in particular ways. It has been argued that an important aspect of identity that stems from Aboriginal cultures lies within the wider sphere of Aboriginal communities and relates to Aboriginal social organisation (Forrest, 1998). The basis of social organisation is that of the "language group," or "family group" (Edwards, 1988). Such groups are characterised by a common language, an affiliation with and responsibility for an area of land, spiritual values and beliefs, common cultural practices and kinship with other Aboriginal people. There are many Indigenous cultural groups in Australia and identification with a group depends on kinship affiliations, or reference to relatives within that group. Forrest (1998) regards connectedness with other Aboriginal people as one of the most important aspects of Aboriginality.

In the same way, the cultures of Torres Strait Islander people have been described in the literature as evidencing clearly identifiable features. A sense of belonging for Torres Strait Islanders is said to come from identification with their island homes as well as a unity that is perpetuated by strong family connections and experiences in their culture. The islands and waters of the Torres Strait are seen to unite the Islanders through spiritual bonds; many of the geographical features in the islands are regarded as markers of the voyages of ancestral beings. Language is also a unifying factor, with three main languages being spoken, including creole—a modern language that incorporates English and Islander languages (Synott & Whatman, 1998). The family and extended family play an important role in socialisation processes as it is within family groups that cultural traditions and beliefs are passed on. For example, certain ceremonial dances and songs are practised as a part of Laws that influence elements of nature. Over the years, Torres Strait Islanders have nurtured an economy based on trading of produce cultivated from the island soils and from fishing. In recent years, Torres Strait Islanders have sought the establishment of an independent political and economic structure. This has resulted from strengthened cultural identity, and, in turn, has served to further strengthen that identity.

This strong cultural identity seems to have carried over into schools in the Torres Strait Islands. The following comments from Torres Strait Islander high school students illustrate this.

> *In Art we draw dhari (headdress), dugong, turtle, fish, green turtle, crayfish, snapper, white fish.*

> *Our team names are about cultural legends—Island Dancer (Kozak), The Warrior…*

> *My favourite subject is KKY (Kala Kawaw Ya) language.*

> *Education—it's a sharing thing…other people can see we are different…we can teach them.*

The notion of a common Australian Indigenous identity has been nurtured over the years almost to the point of stereotyping. Although it is true that several features of this common view were upheld in the consultations with Indigenous people in the current study, it was also clear that regional differences existed, particularly between students from remote and urban areas. In particular, differences related to career aspirations and the identities students derived from their languages and traditional cultural activities. In the current study, remote schools included several schools in the Torres Strait Islands and several other schools servicing children who lived in

Indigenous communities in isolated areas of Australia; regional schools were located mainly in coastal areas or in larger rural towns; and urban schools were those in the metropolitan areas of capital cities.

During the consultations it became evident that in the remote regions there was less of a Western influence on identity formation and that identity was formed by the society in which the Indigenous students lived. Identity with traditional Indigenous cultures and customs was stronger in areas that were remote or had a higher density of Indigenous people. For example, a teacher in a regional high school said, "The kids brought up in…seem to have lost their culture. The out-of-town kids seem to have more culture." Remote students spoke positively about being an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander person, as for example in the following statements.

> *You have a culture, tradition, something to respect.*

> *We have special ways of doing things.*

> *I'm proud of my tribe, sacred land, and ancestors.*

> *I'm proud that I'm an Islander.*

Students in some regional areas also evidenced a strong Indigenous cultural heritage. For example, in one regional centre the teachers' perceptions of Indigenous students were that they were proud to celebrate their culture; in one school, for instance, some Indigenous students taught both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students how to play the didgeridoo. Other students commented on the close alignment of school and home cultural activities.

> *I do Aboriginal dancing at home—kangaroo, cobra.*

> *I do Islander dancing at school.*

While Indigenous cultures were strong in remote and some regional areas, they seemed to be more variable in urban areas. The following comment came from a teacher in an urban school.

> *Aboriginal students appear shy about talking about their backgrounds. Students seem to see that identifying strongly as Aboriginal will clash with their peer culture, unless it can be seen as "being cool".*

This can lead to identity conflict.

> *At school, kids are caught between Western and traditional culture.*

It was noted during the consultations in another urban school that some Koori students chose not to acknowledge their Aboriginality because they thought they were less likely to be picked on. However, in another urban school, students stated that they knew about their own families and that they were part of an urban Koori culture that included people from all over the country. Other comments from urban schools revealed a lack of Indigenous culture with which to identify.

> *In Art we just draw things that the teacher tells us to. It's all right but you get a bit sick of it sometimes. We don't go on any excursions.*

I don't really identify with any of the Aboriginal things around the school, don't know much about it. Last year ASSPA sponsored our Art program in the school, that was good and we all got to learn a bit about Aboriginal things.

Differences existed in career aspirations between remote and urban Indigenous students. Aspirations for the Torres Strait Islanders seemed to be closely tied to their area.

Crayfishing—I get $400/week now sometimes.

I want to do a BSc in marine biology at JCU, but first I'd like to get some experience in the field. You've got to make use of TS.

When asked about the completion of education/training, a typical comment was,

At first, get experience in big business, then when we get autonomy, come back here.

This was similar in another remote area where post-school expectations included

. . .working in the shop, maybe playing professional sport (basketball, softball) and continuing education so I can learn more. After I finish my education I want to help my own people out.

Thus, there was ample evidence of an aspiration by many students to return and work within their communities. However, in some remote and rural areas, career prospects were dim, and there was a lack of role models within the family and community in general. A teacher commented that

There are very few jobs in town; most people are unemployed or get some seasonal work. The kids describe what they'd like to do or be but they have no idea how they can achieve these things.

Examples of regional career aspirations included "Nurse", "Police officer", and "Ranger". Family members were often holding these positions in the town and this was given as the reason for selecting these occupations. Common to many Indigenous students from all areas was the aspiration to become a teacher or to work in the police force.

In urban areas, students' lists of potential careers tended to display greater variety and awareness. Some urban students had high career aspirations as indicated in the following comments.

School is important because if you get a good education you get a good job. I need Maths to be accepted into Zoology at Uni.

To go past Year 12 to University so that I can study physiotherapy.

For most Indigenous young people, then, identity was linked closely to the family–in particular to parents and grandparents, but also to an extended family in which aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews were important people. Interestingly, analysis of the supplementary consultation data and the self-concept questionnaire data obtained from *both* Indigenous and non-Indigenous students indicated that family was of major importance in the construction of identity for both groups of students, although for the Indigenous students, the concept of family encompassed a larger group of people.

Overall, for schools in **urban areas**, one of the most pressing concerns relates to the enhancement of the identities of students as Indigenous people. Some Indigenous students evidenced less positive Indigenous self-identity and this perhaps can be attributed to the fact that there was not enough Indigenous "tone" in the curriculum. To rectify this, perhaps urban schools could (a) acknowledge and reinforce Indigenous identity in a positive light; (b) provide opportunity for Indigenous activities−for example, in art and dance; (c) include Indigenous perspectives across all curriculum areas; and (d) provide a range of Indigenous role models with whom students can identify and who they can seek to emulate.

One of the most urgent issues for Indigenous students in **remote areas** concerns career prospects. In some instances there was a lack of suitable role models locally, or knowledge about outside career opportunities. One teacher suggested that

> *Students can get Abstudy to go and board in hostels in the city but are reluctant to do so on their own, and most of them and their parents don't know about this possibility.*

Suitable careers counselling needs to be provided to students and their families, and where appropriate alternative vocational education programs need to be implemented, particularly in remote areas.

The implication for schools in **all areas** is that students need to be assisted to develop positive identities of themselves as learners in school settings. For this to occur, students need to be shown the value of schooling (through the presentation of role models−not only high profile Indigenous people−in a range of areas), there needs to be a focus on the development of English literacy and numeracy skills so that students have a firm base on which they can proceed to higher levels of education, family and community support for schooling needs to be further encouraged, and teachers of Indigenous students need to be adequately trained to understand the concerns and needs of Indigenous students.

Top

Question 7: How can positive self-identity be assessed or measured?

A list of instruments that measure aspects of identity, self-concept and self-esteem was gleaned from the literature. Several scales have been specifically designed to measure ethnic identity. Some scales are based on the proposal that identity formation occurs in stages. For example, adolescence appears to be a critical stage in identity formation, which has been found to be area-specific. Many of the more recent measures are based on a multidimensional model of self-concept which considers such dimensions as social, emotional, academic, family, peer, and physical self-concepts. Some researchers have used established instruments, others have designed instruments to meet the specific requirements of the study; alternative methods of investigation have included interview and observation techniques

There is some evidence to suggest that tests designed in one culture can be used successfully to explore differences between the self-perceptions of individuals in that culture and the self-perceptions of individuals from another culture; however, there is a need for a specific instrument to be developed for Indigenous Australians, and this should be done in consultation with Indigenous researchers.

> Findings from an exploratory survey in the current study challenge the popular view that Indigenous students have lower self-concepts than non-Indigenous students. Further studies are needed to explore more fully the structure of self-concept/self-identity of Indigenous Australians.

Instruments that have been specifically developed to measure aspects of identity include:

- the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS; Parham & Helms, 1981),
- the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS; Helms & Carter, 1990),
- the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri, Busch-Ressnagel & Geisinger, 1995)
- the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale-Preliminary Form (Choney & Behrens, 1996),
- Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (Bennion & Adams, 1986), and
- the Utrecht-Groningen Identity Development Scale (Meeus, 1992).

The first two of these instruments were developed in response to a recent phenomenon in identity studies that has focussed on the investigation of racial or ethnic identities (Behrens, 1997; Ponterotti & Wise, 1987). Much of this interest stems from the work of Cross (1971) who proposed four distinct stages through which Black people progress as they encounter their blackness. The stages are:

- *Pre-encounter*—involves an anti-Black perspective as people are programmed to view and think of the world as non-Black;
- *Encounter*—individuals develop an awareness of themselves as Black and what this means; there is confusion as individuals search for a new identity;
- *Immersion-emersion*—individuals reject all non-Black values and immerse themselves in black culture; and
- *Internalisation*—individuals develop self-confident and secure Black identities.

Based on Cross's theory, Parham and Helms (1981) developed the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS). This scale, consists of 30 items that are distributed across Cross's four stages. Questions about the validity and reliability of this instrument have given rise to the development of other instruments to measure racial identity. For example, Helms (1984) developed the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) in response to the premise that understanding of white racial outlook has the potential to improve multicultural services in regard to counselling, education, and vocational development. Choney and Behrens (1996) developed the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale-Preliminary Form, Bennion and Adams (1986) developed the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status, and the Utrecht-Groningen Identity Development Scale was developed by Meeus (1992).

Marcia's (1966) identity status model has influenced many studies into identity status, particularly as it develops in adolescence. This model is based on Erikson's work on identity formation in adolescence and has at its core notions of crisis, exploration, and commitment. These variables reflect the distribution of adolescents over four identity statuses: *identity diffusion*, which indicates the adolescent is not yet committed to a specific developmental task and may not have experienced a crisis; *foreclosure*, which indicates the adolescent has made a commitment but has not experienced a crisis; *moratorium*, which indicates the adolescent is in a state of crisis but has not made a commitment; and *identity achievement*, which indicates the adolescent had overcome a crisis and made a commitment. Meeus and Dekovic (1995) conducted a study, grounded in Marcia's identity status model, that investigated identity commitment and

exploration for the areas of relationships, school, and occupation with nearly 3000 Dutch adolescents aged 12 to 24 years. Findings confirmed Marcia's view that development of identity is area-specific. This means that a strong development of identity in one area does not necessarily mean an equally pronounced development in another area.

Also commonly used to measure identity are self-concept and self-esteem instruments such as the Self Description Questionnaire (Marsh, 1988), and the Perceived Competence Scale (Harter, 1982), and it is these types of instruments that are the most numerous, and varied in their theoretical underpinnings. Although there is a plethora of tests that have been used dating back for at least half a decade, it is only in the last 10 to 15 years that tests have become more dependable (Hattie, 1992). Many of the more recent tests are based on a multidimensional model of self-concept, similar to that proposed by Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) in which general self-concept was divided into two dimensions: academic and non-academic self-concepts. Academic self-concept was subdivided into subject areas such as maths and reading self-concepts; non-academic self-concepts were subdivided into social, emotional, and physical self-concepts.

Not all assessments of identity have been dependent upon the use of an established instrument or developmental stages. Some studies have investigated self-identity using naturalistic inquiry methods. For instance, Marsiglia and Halasa (1992) used open-ended inquiry processes, including intensive interviewing and observation, to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and school achievement of Puerto Rican students.

Some studies have investigated self-identity by using both established instruments such as identity status scales, and instruments that have been specifically developed for the study. Scott (1992) employed this methodology when he investigated the aspects of Aboriginal students' lives that contribute to their identity. He used the Piers-Harris Self-concept Scale, the ACER Quality of School Life, Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control, and two specially devised questionnaires that examined attitudes about self, others, culture, education and health. He found that Aboriginal students reported poorer self-concepts and lower quality of school life than non-Aboriginal students; he also found that they have a more externally oriented locus of control than non-Aboriginal students—that is, they tend to believe that people and forces outside themselves control their lives (as opposed to believing that they are responsible for their own fate).

According to Hattie (1992), recent improvements in test construction have allowed researchers to feel more confident in using measures of self-concept for a range of purposes. However, although the estimates of reliability are typically very high, there is a concern about the construct validity of self-concept measures, particularly when they are used in cultures that are different from the one in which the measure originated. On the other hand, there is some evidence to suggest that tests designed in one culture can be used successfully to explore differences between the self-perceptions of individuals in that culture and the self-perceptions of individuals from another culture (e.g., Kwok & Lai, 1993; Watkins & Cheung, 1996).

There has been no exploration of the applicability of various measures of self constructs to the Australian Indigenous student population, and in this respect it was impossible to locate a measure that could be used with impunity in the current study. A number of measures of self-identity and self-concept had been located from the review of the literature, but none of these was considered in its entirety to be appropriate for the population of students in this study. Instead, to cater for the large variation in both age and English literacy skills of students in this study, a simplified version of a self-concept instrument was constructed.

34

The instrument consisted of 14 questions representing four components of self-beliefs that had been identified as playing an important role in the development of the identities of young Indigenous people. The factors identified in *How I Feel About Me* (see Appendix B) concern General Liking of Self (items 1, 2, 7, and 8), Sense of Personal Efficacy (items 3, 9, and 10), Family (items 4, 5, and 6), and School (items 11, 12, 13, and 14). Items in the instrument were drawn from several other widely used measures of self-concept and self-esteem (The Self Description Questionnaire, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, Song and Hattie Self-Concept Scale).

It was not possible within the specified timeframe of the project to trial the instrument in a methodologically sound way. Nevertheless, items such as those in *How I Feel About Me* have been used in other instruments with students from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, including, for instance, African American, Korean, Nepalese, Japanese, and Filipino students. This suggests that at least a modicum of insight could be gained from the responses provided by students. Accordingly, a small set of self-concept survey data was collected from *both* Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (n = 194, and n = 43 respectively).

In the analysis of the self-concept questionnaire data, we were interested to identify any differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in terms of the four subscales of self-concept. We also explored differences between the scores on each of these subscales within each of the groups; that is, we were interested in the question "In which of these areas do students feel most/least positive?" Finally, we were interested in whether there were differences between primary and secondary school students, students from urban and rural areas, and girls and boys. Because the sample of non-Indigenous students was small, we were not able to satisfactorily explore these latter differences in the non-Indigenous sample.

The two groups of students did not differ significantly on their mean scores for the General Self or for the Efficacy subscales. However, the Indigenous students recorded significantly higher scores on the Family and School subscales. The higher score for Family is not surprising, given the literature that attests to the particular importance of family within Indigenous Australian contexts. Also worthy of note, however, is the fact that *both* groups achieved higher scores on the Family subscale than on any of the other subscales, although for the non-Indigenous students the difference between Family and the other subscales was only significant when it was compared with the School subscale. Surprisingly, the Indigenous students had significantly higher scores for the School subscale than did their non-Indigenous peers. These results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1   Scores on the Subscales of the Self-Concept Questionnaire

Self-Concept Scales	Indigenous Students (n = 194)	Non-Indigenous Students (n = 43)	Significance of difference
General Self	3.46	3.33	NS
Efficacy	3.44	3.33	NS
Family	3.77	3.40	*
School	3.00	2.36	*

Note: Scores are on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 indicating a high self-concept; NS = non significant
* indicates significant differences between the groups

For level of schooling, there were significant differences between primary and secondary school students on Family and School subscales, with the primary students recording higher scores on both subscales.

In terms of location there were no significant differences between students from urban and rural areas on any of the subscales (there were no data from students in remote areas).

The only significant difference between the girls and boys was in terms of the School subscale with the girls recording higher scores, both at the primary and the secondary levels of schooling.

Thus, although this exploratory use of a self-concept survey has resulted in findings that challenge the popular view that Indigenous students have lower self-concepts than non-Indigenous students, further studies are needed to explore more fully the structure of self-concept/self-identity of Indigenous Australians. Because of a history of having been the object of research by "those from the outside", many Indigenous people are understandably suspicious of Western survey methods that do not necessarily take into account the differences in values and practices that exist between cultures. It is important, therefore, that research instruments are devised in collaboration with Indigenous researchers if they are to be used to increase understanding about self-identity (and other constructs) among Indigenous people.

Question 8: What is the relationship between positive self-identity and school success of Indigenous people, including attendance, participation, achievement and completion of schooling?

> Students in the current study showed positive self-identity as Indigenous people but this was not necessarily linked with successful educational outcomes.
>
> Positive self-identity as a *student* is likely to be associated with school success. To develop positive self-identity as a student, Indigenous students need to perceive value in schooling. Factors associated with this include:
>
> - school—where students have a sense of belonging;
> - teachers—who are warm, supportive, and have positive expectations;
> - curriculum—which has relevance; and
> - support and encouragement from family, peers and community.
>
> A model was developed illustrating factors involved in achieving successful educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Much of what has been written in the literature dealing with self-identity implies that positive educational outcomes are linked with positive self-identity (Ainley, Batten, Collins, & Withers, 1998; Day, 1994), and with such self-related factors as high self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Vittorio Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Zimmerman, 1989), positive self-concept (Hattie, 1992), positive self-esteem (McCormack, 1997; Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995), internal locus of control (Bandura, 1982; Girdano & Everly, 1986), and self-regulated learning (Corno, 1992; Paris & Newman, 1990). In contrast, negative educational outcomes have been associated with negative perceptions of self (Cole & Sapp, 1988; Nolen-Hoeksema, Girgus, & Seligman, 1986).

In the Australian context, although there is a growing literature dealing with good educational practices and ways of achieving positive outcomes in Indigenous education (e.g., Hudspith & Williams, 1994; Malin, 1998; McInerney & McInerney, 1998, Partington & McCudden, 1992), there is also an extensive literature which discusses the inadequacies of schooling for Indigenous children and therefore raises concerns about the development among Indigenous children of negative perceptions of self as a student, and self as a person. For example, Partington, Godfrey, and Harrison (1997) report that many Indigenous students have faced racism from other students and teachers, and that they have achieved lower educational outcomes than their non-Indigenous peers. Ainley et al. (1998) concluded that for many Indigenous students these kinds of experiences have resulted in decreased self-esteem.

The alienation of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Australian school system is believed by many to be associated with attrition rates that are higher than for any other group of students. Although it is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the school attendance patterns of Indigenous students, there have been a number of studies that, when taken together, suggest that the picture is not good. Findings from one national study into the retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education (Yunupingu, 1995) found the following: (a) participation in secondary school for Indigenous students is lower than for other groups of students; (b) many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not complete the compulsory years of schooling; and (c) only 25% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who started Year 7 or 8 five or four years earlier were enrolled in Year 12 in 1993. Groome and Hamilton (1995) examined ABSTUDY data and found that (a) the retention rates of Aboriginal girls were significantly higher than for boys; (b) there was a marked fall-off in enrolments beyond Year 10; and (c) there was marked variation among states in the retention rates of Aboriginal students and in their progression to tertiary education. Beresford (1993) found that Western Australia had the lowest retention rate for Aboriginal students in Australia. He also found a high correlation between early school leaving and poor literacy and numeracy skills and socioeconomic disadvantage among Aboriginal students. Beresford concluded that "current models of school organisation, curriculum and resourcing are often inadequate to address the causes of early school leaving" (p. 16). In terms of higher education, a recent study concluded that Indigenous Australian students are much less likely than other students to persist with university studies (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1999).

Byrne, Buchanan, Grant and Beyers (1997) identified lack of self-esteem, lack of encouragement from within the school or family, and racism as reasons for high levels of alienation and attrition among Indigenous students. School-based factors that may contribute to high attrition rates and poor performance in schools were identified by Reaburn (1993) as follows:

• Principals and teachers feel ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of issues associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
• Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have a history of intermittent attendance and this undermines the motivation and commitment of educators; and
• Teacher expectations are lowered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and this further marginalises their participation.

Other factors associated with poor educational performance among many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have included poverty, and discipline policies that conflict with child rearing practices in Indigenous communities (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991).

In the current study, Indigenous students often expressed positive feelings about themselves, their culture, and their family, but their feelings about school and about themselves as students were ambivalent. High self-esteem and a positive identity as an Indigenous person did not appear to be necessarily linked to successful educational outcomes. For instance, in speaking of two students in a semi-rural primary school, one teacher noted that

> *. . . they identified strongly as Aboriginal and developed high self-esteem through that identification, but had poor educational outcomes.*

Most discussions about the importance of school centred around getting a job in the future, and this was seen as a reason for wanting to achieve at school. For instance:

> *School is important to learn stuff, to get a job, to get education. Mum told me it's important to get to be smart, to learn about other cultures like Chinese and Japanese.*

> *You have to get a job and not be on the dole.*

> *It helps you get money so you are not poor. You get a better job, a better future, a better life-style . . . better than in the streets, being homeless.*

> *You can't really live in this world today without an education. It's very high tech these days.*

But not all students were positive about the value of the education they were receiving, as is indicated in the comments of this student:

> *It's too boring. They don't make it fun so you want to come back. The teachers get shitty with you if you muck around in class.*

Noted elsewhere in this report is the negative influence of some teachers when they make comments to students that indicate a lack of belief in students' abilities to succeed at school ("You'll never get through Years 11 and 12"), the pressure students feel under to gain recognition of their efforts and academic worth ("Lots of white people think we're not very smart"), and the culture among many students of "anti-intellectualism. Also noted were the views of some parents who do not think school is very important because it "never did me any good.

On the other hand, it was very acceptable to feel positive about one's physical abilities. Most students, particularly the boys, had strong and positive feelings about their abilities in a range of sports, and they actively promoted this aspect of themselves among both their Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers. Many of the boys aspired to careers in sports such as football, basketball, soccer, and boxing.

Identity as a member of the wider Australian community appeared to be linked to students' persistence at school and their recognition of the importance of getting a good education for their future careers. However, many spoke of the difficulty of achieving the balance between maintaining a strong sense of one's Indigenous identity while at the same time achieving in the broader Australian society.

The findings of the current study support the view that school success is likely to be associated with a positive sense of *self as a student*. However, it does not follow that a generic sense of positive self-identity will automatically result in positive educational outcomes for Indigenous

students. Irrespective of how positive one's cultural self-identity may be, the amount of effort that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are likely to expend on the pursuit of academic success is dependent on such factors as how much value they attach to schooling (McInerney & McInerney, 1998), their personal goals and aspirations (McInerney & McInerney, 1998), the influence of such contextual factors as families, peers, community and the media (Grotevant, 1987; Bandura et al., 1996), the impact of such school-related factors as the relevance of the curriculum (Malin, 1998; Partington & McCuddin, 1992), the attitudes of the teachers (Fanshawe, 1989; McInerney & McInerney, 1998), the suitability of the teaching strategies (Malin, 1998; Partington, 1998; Partington & McCuddin, 1992), and the appropriateness of the learning environment (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1997; Malin, 1998; Rogers, 1983).

The challenge for educators is to ensure that schools are places where Indigenous students want to be, where their presence and participation is valued, where they feel successful, and where they see value in completing their schooling. The participants in the present study have provided many insights about the kind of schooling that appeals to them. For example, they respond positively to teachers who are warm, encouraging, respectful, and make realistic demands (Fanshawe, 1989; Malin, 1998; Munns, 1998).

> *Good teachers are friendly, not grumpy. They never give up. They are always pushing you. They always listen and help you. They have a good knowledge of Indigenous culture.*

> *Teachers need to respect Indigenous students . . . just be aware . . . take time out for you. Some are good at this. Others are not very nice. Respect goes both ways. Indigenous students work harder for teachers who respect their students.*

Indigenous students prefer schools where they feel a sense of belonging, where they feel welcome, comfortable, recognised, and valued (Malin, 1998).

> *This school makes you feel good about yourself . . . Grade 8 students feel comfortable. I really like the cultural activities in this school. It's good to meet other Aboriginal students. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous students get on well. The principal is supportive, and some of the teachers understand our problems at home.*

When it comes to curriculum, Indigenous students, like their non-Indigenous peers, are resentful of boring lessons but respond positively to work which they regard as interesting and relevant (Malin, 1998; Partington & McCuddin, 1992).

> *Mr X is good because he explains things more. I don't like Maths. It's boring, and we muck around. The teacher never stops writing on the blackboard—just writes for the whole period. We do better at the subjects we enjoy.*

> *We don't like boring teachers. We like teachers who do fun things in class—teachers who are nice and caring and let you do more stuff.*

> *School needs to concentrate on giving kids skills that they can use when they've finished school. . . . They need to teach the kids ways to get an income. . . . Maybe kids can do some practical TAFE subjects at school that can be accredited.*
> (Indigenous parent)

It is apparent from the literature review and from the results of the consultations that school outcomes for Indigenous students are dependent on a wide range of interacting factors which impact on overall self-identity and on self-identity as a student. Some of these factors are presented in Figure 1. The figure is organised into four interrelated segments: (a) factors impacting on the self-identity of Indigenous children; (b) factors impacting on the quality of schooling for Indigenous children; (c) further consideration of the impact of positive school experiences on the self-identity of Indigenous children and on school outcomes; and (d) the role of the Australian community, through various government and community agencies, in helping to develop and maintain positive self-identity in Indigenous young people. The figure reflects the emphasis of the present project by focusing particularly on the relationship between the school and Indigenous self-identity. It is acknowledged that in other contexts, other elements of the figure, such as family or peers, might similarly be emphasised.

Figure 1 illustrates the views expressed in this report that for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children self-identity is constructed in response to such contextual factors as culture and society, family, media, peers, and the school (Grotevant, 1987). Positive experiences in these contexts facilitate the development of positive self-identity. An inference which can be drawn from Figure 1 is that by the time the child begins school a strong sense of identity has already emerged. However, this self-identity is dynamic, and it continues to develop, not only in relation to the factors mentioned so far but also in relation to such school-related factors as teachers, curriculum, teaching strategies, and the school environment. As school factors and non-school factors interact with personal factors, a sense of self as a student emerges for Indigenous young people and impacts on school performance, overall self-identity, and school outcomes (see Figure 1).

The data collected in the present study support the view that generally positive life experiences and relationships help Indigenous children to develop a positive self-identity, while generally positive experiences at school help them to develop a positive sense of self as a student. As illustrated in Figure 1, belief in one's own ability as a student is related to school success and enhanced opportunities for success on completing school. However, it is important to note that one of the major needs of Indigenous youth that was expressed time and time again during the consultations was the need for employment. It follows that a major challenge for secondary schools, universities, and TAFE colleges, working in cooperation with one another, is to prepare Indigenous students for the world of work. Nurturing the maintenance and development of positive self-identities is a very important part of this process, but it is also essential for Indigenous students to know that their education will lead to real job opportunities. Consequently, a major challenge confronting the Australian community as a whole, and rural Australia in particular, is to find ways of increasing the employment opportunities for Indigenous young people, both in the public sector and in the private sector (see Figure 1).
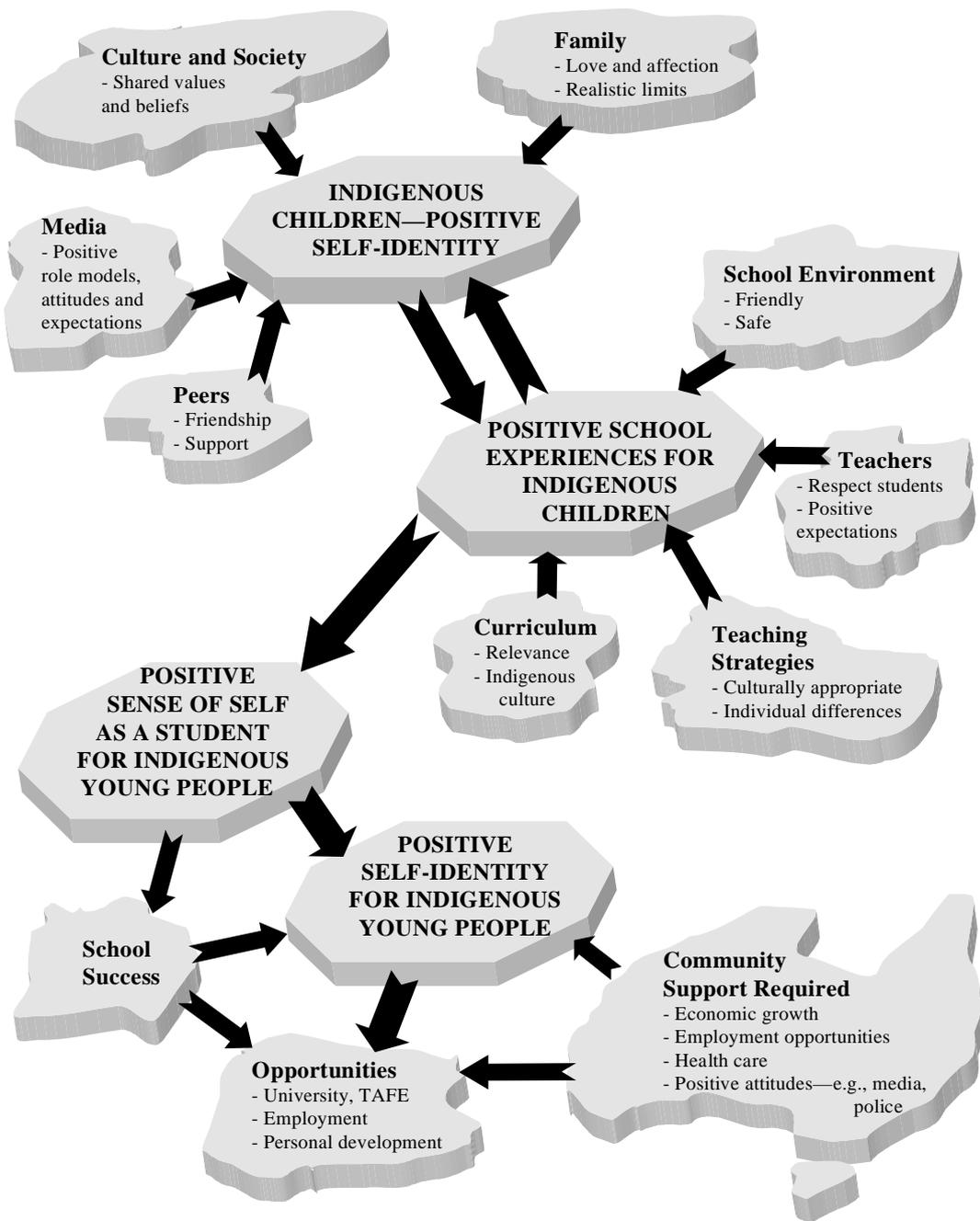
Figure 1. Achieving successful educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Question 9: How can positive self-identity be increased in order to improve school outcomes for Indigenous students?

> The relationship between self-identity (and other self-related constructs) and school outcomes is complex. In terms of attachment to and participation in school, students need to feel valued as Indigenous people (if that aspect of their identity is important to them). In terms of academic performance, students need to value the attainment of academic skills and perceive themselves to be capable of such attainment. For these things to occur attention needs to be focussed on:
>
> - the qualities of teachers;
> - school organisation and curriculum issues;
> - discipline practices within schools;
> - involvement of Indigenous people in schools;
> - continued bilingual language programs where appropriate;
> - alternative education programs;
> - career education;
> - promotion of a range of role models;
> - promotion of Indigenous cultures; and
> - family and community support.

The Qualities of Teachers

Non-Indigenous teachers need to be better trained in awareness of Indigenous behaviours, cultures and expectations. There was a common view that many of the teachers had no idea of the kinds of lives the students lived, did not know how to talk or interact with them, asked embarrassing questions in class, overly criticised students in public, and said racist things such as "*Aboriginal kids don't need boots for football; they run around barefoot anyway*".

Teachers need to be aware of and accept that Aboriginal English is different from Standard Australian English. In terms of teacher attitude and understanding, how teachers reacted to students' use of Aboriginal English at school was raised as an important factor in the development of positive self-identity.

Teachers should participate in the professional development programs that are available to help them to implement culturally appropriate curricula and teaching methods. These should be developed by State and Territory Departments of Education *in conjunction with* Aboriginal education consultative groups.

School Organisation and Curriculum Issues

Students need to continue to use (and feel good about using) Aboriginal English. Standard Australian English needs to be an addition to their linguistic repertoire, not a replacement. Schools need to adopt more of a "going out" mentality rather than expecting that members of the local Indigenous community should always come to the school.

Indigenous studies programs should be taught by Indigenous people where possible. The provision of Indigenous studies programs for preservice teachers should also include, where possible, a program to allow support people to follow-up when teachers initially go out to schools

in which there are Indigenous students. Indigenous perspectives should be included wherever possible in the teaching of all subjects in the school curriculum.

Discipline Practices Within Schools

Fair, equitable, and sensible discipline policies that are inclusive of all students need to be developed and deployed. In terms of disciplinary measures, it was not uncommon to hear comments about the inappropriateness of some of the measures used, particularly in relation to suspension. Indigenous students frequently said that they bore the brunt of the punishments—that non-Indigenous students were less likely to be dealt with unfairly. Some students were suspended for being absent!

Involvement of Indigenous People in Schools

Almost all of the people we spoke with agreed that the presence of Indigenous adults in the school promoted positive self-identity among Indigenous students.

If the ASSPA program committees have a high profile in the schools, invariably there is a strong sense of the valuing of Indigenous cultures by the non-Indigenous students and teachers, and a strong sense of positive self-identity by Indigenous students.

Of particular importance, is the contribution of AIEWs to the development of positive attachment to school by Indigenous students.

Continued Bilingual Language Programs

In relation to bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory, it was argued strongly that they need to be retained but they need to be made more effective by rigorously teaching English earlier than is currently being done. It was also argued that bilingual programs should be taught by trained bilingual teachers.

Alternative Education Programs

Alternative programs, that involve the development of practical skills, should be included as options for those Indigenous students (and non-Indigenous students) who are less academically oriented yet enjoy and are good at practical activities. "Alternative" programs were developed in some schools to counter the negative attitudes that so many Indigenous students had to "academic" programs of study. Schools in which there was a strong focus on vocational education were seen frequently to be offering programs of greater relevance to students who had histories of absenteeism and failure but who had been encouraged to remain at school.

Career Education

In the supplementary consultations conducted to identify similarities and differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in terms of their identities, the major difference noted concerned students' self-perceptions in regard to career aspirations. Non-Indigenous students were very definite about their future plans. By comparison, the Indigenous students were less decided and somewhat lacking in detailed knowledge about what was involved in the various careers they mentioned. This suggests a need for schools to focus on creating a greater awareness among Indigenous students and their families of the range of career options available to them. Ideally, this should occur at as early an age as possible.

Promotion of Non-Sporting Role Models

There is a history of Indigenous sporting personalities being held in high esteem by Indigenous people. The difficulty with this is twofold—not every Indigenous child/student will become a sporting personality; and the careers of sporting personalities are often short-lived. Indigenous children and adolescents need to know that role models vary—that a role model is not only a

person who reaches the pinnacle of his or her chosen career, but can be a local Indigenous motor mechanic, their home/school liaison officer, an Indigenous nurse or health worker, an Indigenous teacher, artist, tertiary student, and so on. A distinct advantage of promoting local role models is that they are seen more often, and might agree to be mentors for Indigenous students. Thus, schools should be encouraged to promote a range of local role models for Indigenous students.

Promotion of Indigenous Cultures

Indigenous cultures and history should be promoted within schools and the wider community in both urban as well as rural areas. There was visual evidence of the promotion of Indigenous cultures in a number of schools (e.g., the "Hall of Fame", displaying of Indigenous art, flying of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance groups existed in some schools and these were a particular source of pride for most students. Some groups had travelled within states, nationally, and internationally and had achieved considerable recognition at competitions. In general, where there was an obvious acknowledgment and promotion of aspects of Indigenous cultures, Indigenous students displayed more positive feelings about their place within the total school community.

Family and Community Support

In the current study, students reported that the most important people in their lives were their parents and other family members. Also important in the students' lives were members of the larger Indigenous community. For the most part, it is within the family that Indigenous young people learn about their culture, their traditional heritage, who they are as Indigenous Australians, and the prospects that exist for their future. It is also within the family and community that role models are observed and copied. Thus, the family and community play an important role in the shaping of positive self-identity for Indigenous young people. However, as may occur in any community, there exist both positive and negative influences and models in Indigenous communities. It is the responsibility of Indigenous communities to ensure that the most positive models are presented to their young people. This could be facilitated by developing a comprehensive media campaign, including television, radio, and newspaper coverage, showing Indigenous Australians living and working successfully in a range of situations within both the broader Australian community and in specific Indigenous communities. Recently, there appears to have been increased media attention on issues faced by Indigenous Australians. Future coverage of Indigenous issues must focus on positive aspects of Indigenous life. In this way, students can observe constructive possibilities that exist in life, and consequently set themselves goals, and pursue and accomplish their education with these goals to strive for.

In addition to a campaign that fosters positive Indigenous participation in the community, programs aimed at informing Indigenous parents about the role and value of education need to be developed. Such programs should include details on the role of the school, the role of teachers and the role parents have in their children's education. In conjunction with such programs there should be an intensive push to get Indigenous parents to participate in their children's school experiences including: at sports days, with their school work, and in assisting teachers, where possible, in the classroom. The symbiotic relationship between the culture of Indigenous students and the culture of the school is important in establishing and maintaining positive self-identity and good educational outcomes; it must be established and then reinforced by measures of an ongoing nature. This needs to be a long term and extensive goal in urban, rural and remote areas, and it must involve school-based as well as Indigenous community personnel.
Top

Summary of the findings

Self-identity can be conceptualised as our perception of who we think we are, and the value we place upon that perception; it is a composite of our personal and social functioning in a variety of contexts. Because those contexts are varied and constantly changing, self-identity is not static but is continuously being reformed. The development of positive self-identity is related also to the successful interplay of other self schemas such as self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-esteem, and self-concept. In practical terms, this conceptualisation of self-identity has several implications for Indigenous students and important others in their lives.

First, it implies the importance of noting that there is not one but many Indigenous Australian contexts. For instance, the contexts in which young Indigenous people function in remote communities are not the same as the contexts in which young people in urban or rural areas function. Even within these differing contexts, there are multiple influences on the identities of Indigenous youth. Family and community influences may be quite different from the influences students encounter in the school environment. For some students, these differences will not be at great odds with each other—the values promoted, experiences encountered, and expected ways of behaving in the home will not be all that different from the values on which the school is built, the experiences that are offered, or the ways in which students are expected to behave. However, when students experience marked differences between the distinct environments in which they function, and when they have not been helped to understand and adjust to those differences in terms of their own functioning, the tension created may serve to alienate them from one environment or the other. Thus, we need to ensure that differences between environments are reduced when this is possible and appropriate; alternatively, we need to ensure that students learn ways of functioning in multiple environments that do not create tension for them.

Second, it is important to take into consideration a healthy interplay between the multiple aspects of a young person's identity. Most desirable is for young people to have a positive identity in all aspects of how they perceive of themselves (e.g., as a Torres Strait Islander, as a maths students, as an athlete, as a person who is popular with peers, and so on), and for those perceptions to be confirmed in the contexts that support those identities. There is evidence to suggest that excessive contradictions between the various aspects of self may create psychological tension for adolescents, and lead them to be depressed or to behave in ways that are self-handicapping. There are no studies to show that this phenomenon is more prevalent among Indigenous students. However, given the reported marked differences for some students in terms of their experiences within the home and Indigenous community, and their experiences at school, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that the contradictions for some Indigenous students may be sufficiently great to be of particular concern. Thus, we need to ensure that all aspects of the identities of Indigenous young people are valued; in the school environment, this means that the identities of students as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people need to be valued as much as do their identities as students.

The dynamic and multifaceted nature of self-identity, combined with the multiple influences on its development implies the need for flexibility in the methods used to enhance self-identity for Indigenous students. There will not be one single approach that will develop and maintain those aspects of most importance in the attainment of positive outcomes of schooling. In the first instance, there will need to be greater dialogue between the school and the home so that all stakeholders understand and value the context of the other. Parents/carers, community members, and teachers will need to work together to help make changes when that is the most seemly thing to do. When students function in different environments, they need to be helped to value and function appropriately in each of those environments; that is, students need to be shown how to

behave in ways that will ensure success in a range of environments. Most importantly, they need to be confident that no aspects of their identities will be undermined by the responses of others.

The relationship between self-identity (and other self-related constructs) and school performance is complex. The view one takes of the causal predominance of self-identity or academic achievement will determine the approach taken with regard to self-identity enhancement. In general, efforts to enhance self-identity (self-concept) via generalised self-concept programs have not had lasting effects on the school performance of students. More effective have been efforts that incorporate a strong emphasis on increasing academic skill levels. When students are helped to master academic skills, they develop a more positive concept of themselves as students. Hence, they are more likely to persist rather than give up easily on academic tasks, and they are more likely to approach rather than avoid new tasks.

In this respect, early success at school is important so that students develop the basic skills needed to continue at more advanced levels. Such skill development among students implies that they will have teachers who themselves are skilled in the art of pedagogy. The pedagogical skills needed by teachers will cover a range of areas. For instance, teachers will be culturally aware of issues related to language (for instance they will know whether English is a first, second, or even third language for their students), they will seek out and use culturally appropriate material, they will create warm and supportive classroom environments in which they help students to set realistic and challenging goals, and they will know about and be able to use a range of approaches to the development of literacy and numeracy skills in young people.

If schools are to be places in which students feel their Indigenous identities are valued, as well as places where they can develop the skills they need in order to have positive identities as students, clearly, principals and teachers have a central role in ensuring that these things will happen. Hence, there are implications for teacher recruitment and training, and for the ongoing support and professional development of teachers who work with Indigenous students. The frequent reports in the literature that Indigenous students do not always find teachers to be accepting of their cultures, warm in their relationships with them, or realistic in their expectations of them suggest strongly that teacher training and placement in schools should be an important focus of change.

In sum, there is evidence that it is possible to achieve a positive self-identity both as an Indigenous Australian and as a competent and confident student within the school system. However, the achievement of a well-integrated identity is dependent on a number of factors that are related, in particular, to the school and home environments. The extent to which schools and individual teachers recognise and incorporate the cultural identities of students into the school environment and curriculum is critical to the development of a positive cultural identity among Indigenous people. So, too, is the recognition in the home of the importance to young people of an education that equips them for life in a complex and constantly changing world. Thus, the more symbiotic the relationship between the home and the school, the greater the likelihood that young people will value themselves both as capable students and as members of a rich Indigenous culture.

On a final note, it is important that the efforts of most teachers and their strong commitment to their students do not go unnoticed. Most Indigenous students with whom we spoke were positive in their comments about their teachers, principals, and their school experiences in general. Some students aspired to be teachers themselves. The results of the self-concept questionnaire completed by a small sample of students indicated that Indigenous students were *more* positive in their thoughts and feelings about school than were their non-Indigenous peers. The challenge now

is for teachers, in conjunction with members of Indigenous communities, and people from relevant State and Federal Government agencies to seek ways to address the complex array of factors that prevent some Indigenous students from valuing and being advantaged by their school experiences.

Top

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident from this study that interviewees' comments about the issues relating to the schooling of Indigenous students are not new. For the most part, comments support the goals of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, 1989* (AEP), and endorse the subsequent *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1996-2002*.

Since the implementation of the AEP, communication between schools and Indigenous communities generally has improved through the strengthening of Indigenous consultative mechanisms, as well as initiatives such as the employment of Indigenous education workers, the ASSPA Program, and homework centres established in collaboration with ASSPA program committees through the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS). However, although Indigenous students' access, participation and retention have shown improvement in some areas, equitable outcomes are not being achieved.

During the consultations it became clear that most Indigenous arents/carers and community members care about Indigenous students and their schooling, they have expectations and aspirations for their children, and they want them to succeed. Although many parents and community members have little formal education themselves, through participation in school committees and activities they have some knowledge of how schools are organised and what is taught. They also believe there is the potential for greater involvement if schools develop stronger consultation and negotiation mechanisms with Indigenous parents.

Consequently, during consultations suggestions for improving the capacity of schools to cater for the educational needs of Indigenous students were made by Indigenous parents/carers, community members, education workers, and students; they were often supported by school principals and teachers. Consideration was given to their suggestions and comments as well as salient issues from the literature in developing the following recommendations. All recommendations are relevant to Indigenous students' self-identity within the context of schools.

Of particular note is the extent to which the suggestions of Indigenous parents/carers, community members and teachers align with the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*.

> *Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians' intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development. By providing a supportive and nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future.*

> (The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, 1999)

1.   Indigenous Positive Self-Identity, Contextual Factors

The literature reviewed focused on self-identity from three main perspectives. It discussed the multiple dimensions of individual self-identity in relation to specific contexts, and ways in which one's self-identity is influenced by culture and society, family, peers, and school and work

environments. It also asserted that identity is culturally bound as individuals construct their own points of view, develop attitudes, and generally make choices about their careers, values, and relationships within a preordained cultural context. The focus then turned to self-identity formation and dimensions for Indigenous Australians.

Consultations, in the form of interviews and focus groups with Indigenous students, parents/carers, education workers, community members, teachers and principals supported the notion that identity is culturally bound. The consultations also highlighted the importance of a supportive total school environment in the development of positive self-concepts and enhanced self-efficacy and self-esteem amongst Indigenous students.

The existence of a diversity of Indigenous groups was demonstrated in the interviews. This was based not only on the area or schools within which interviews were conducted, but in accordance with immediate and extended family groupings, language group and place of origin. Common to most Indigenous interviewees, however, was the desire to be acknowledged as Indigenous and to be valued both as individuals and as a group. Also evident was a range of responses, sometimes divergent, to questions asked.

Thus, the concept of pan-Aboriginality, whereby Indigenous Australians have often been referred to as a single entity, was not a reality in the various settings where interviews and focus groups were conducted. Through their responses, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people demonstrated their individuality within the specific social and cultural sub-groups of which they are members.

From the numerous studies undertaken during the last decade, it is known that:

- A high proportion of Indigenous people live in poverty;
- For many Indigenous families, living conditions are overcrowded and accommodation standards are poor;
- Indigenous unemployment rates are higher than those of other groups, particularly in remote and rural communities;
- Indigenous people experience extremely poor health;
- Alcoholism and other substance-abuse is problematic in some communities, and among urban teenagers;
- Reported incidents of family violence are significantly greater in Indigenous communities than in the rest of Australia;
- Numbers of Indigenous children under care and protection orders are significantly higher than those from other groups;
- Rates of arrest and incarceration of Indigenous adults and juveniles continue to be greater than those for the remainder of the population.

At least some of these issues directly affect most Indigenous families—adults and children alike—whether they are located in urban, rural or remote areas. Given that the development of differing concepts of self occurs within certain contexts, it is not to be expected that Indigenous students will either develop or exhibit all of the multiple dimensions of positive self-identity in all situations.

Schools can only work towards the development of positivity and educational achievement with those children and adolescents who attend regularly. In most instances, schools are competing with a range of factors external to the school in aiming to develop in Indigenous students a sense of self-worth as well as the ability and desire to succeed educationally and socially.

Teachers, principals and education workers cannot be expected, nor it is their role, to address the many complex external factors that contribute to individual Indigenous students' concepts of self. At the same time, it is recognised that schools in isolation cannot address many factors affecting Indigenous children and adolescents. Schools can only do so much, because at the end of each day Indigenous students must go home to their families and communities. Consequently long term planning that addresses holistic physical and spiritual well being of Indigenous communities is required; and must be undertaken in collaboration with respective Indigenous communities.

RECOMMENDATION 1

It is recommended that

a) **Local education providers work with individual Indigenous communities to determine ways in which education can better work with other services including health and social services to enable education and other services to be planned and delivered in a more cohesive manner. This could include the development of physical facilities and services in a more integrated manner. By better integrating services, communities are in a better position to address interrelationships between such areas as education outcomes, health, self-esteem and self-worth, and spiritual and physical wellbeing.**

Schools, especially in rural and remote areas, should take a leadership role in planning how services can be better integrated within communities in acknowledgment of the vital importance of such service provision to the long-term future of children. Government could play a role in assisting local communities specifically by advising as to how to best organise and provide access to Government services, and by overseeing planning processes if required.

Implementation requires a coordinated approach involving local education providers, individual Indigenous communities, and relevant Government service providers.
Resource implications are minimal. Coordination of programs and activities should not require substantial additional funds.

b) **Personnel in schools should seek to be fully informed on Indigenous issues, both on a local level and more broadly. This is to ensure they are in the best position to plan and coordinate services to the benefit of the Indigenous community.**

Implementation and resource implications: Education systems need to provide guidelines for schools with Indigenous students that incorporate relevant Indigenous issues into staff professional development activities. Sessions on Indigenous cultural and contemporary issues should be presented by, or in consultation with, local Indigenous community members. Such issues should be standard components of the context for planning and delivery of curriculum in the area where the school is located, and should not require funds additional to school professional development budgets.

2. Indigenous Education Workers

Roles of Indigenous education workers

The need for more Indigenous education workers was expressed consistently by interviewees. Schools appoint Indigenous education workers for specific purposes, for example:

- Home/school liaison officers; who ideally must have a rapport with the local Indigenous community, and possess some knowledge and understanding of local issues, as well as relevant services or individuals for referral purposes. In some schools, home/school liaison officers assume responsibilities similar to those of truant officers, welfare workers or social workers.
- Teacher aides; who are required to work with individual or small groups of students on English literacy (especially reading), numeracy, and so on, and generally assist in classroom and school activities.
- Teaching assistants; who interact between the teachers and students, and undertake some teaching duties. Teaching assistants are most frequently employed in bilingual schools.
- Cultural officers; who teach aspects of Indigenous cultures to all students within the school, organise and participate in cultural activities, and assist/advise teachers in relation to Indigenous perspectives within curriculum.
- District Indigenous education workers; it was further suggested that every school that has at least one Indigenous child requires access to an Indigenous education worker, and that there was a need for education systems to facilitate such access.

Training of Indigenous education workers

Some concern was expressed that people appointed to positions as Indigenous education workers did not always possess the skills and knowledge for the duties required. Therefore, it is imperative that the roles and responsibilities of an Indigenous education worker are clearly defined and delimited. It is also essential that appointees undertake training in the role and responsibilities of an Indigenous education worker.

It is noted that strategies for addressing education and training of Indigenous education workers, based on research conducted during 1992 to 1994, are recommended in the report coordinated by the Australian Education Union, *Ara Kuwaritjakutu Project: Towards a New Way, Stage 3* (Davis, Woodberry, & Buckskin, 1995, pp.3-8). While it was not the purpose of the current study to focus on Indigenous Education worker education and training, aspects of the 1995 report may be a useful guide to strengthening the ability of schools and education systems to enhance Indigenous students' concepts of self-as-student, and effectively meet their educational needs.

<u>RECOMMENDATION 2</u>

It is recommended that

a) **Schools appointing Indigenous education workers should clearly define and state the role of this position within the context of the total school. Schools should ensure that opportunities exist for Indigenous education workers to undertake training appropriate to those duties.**

b) **Where possible, schools which do not have an Indigenous education worker because they have insufficient numbers of Indigenous students**

(under 30 students) seek to enter into cooperative arrangements with schools in a similar situation to effectively 'share' an Indigenous education worker. In schools where there are only very small numbers of Indigenous students, local Indigenous communities should consider recruiting volunteers to provide assistance.

Implementation and resource implications:
a) Development of relevant training programs for AIEWs may need to be initiated by school education systems for delivery by vocational education providers. It is, however, the responsibility of schools to define the roles of their AIEWs and encourage AIEWs' to undertake professional development. Funds may be required to establish appropriate training programs.
b) In education systems, AIEWs could be appointed either to education systems' district offices, or to clusters of schools, to service schools with small numbers of Indigenous students. Resource implications are that existing staff structures may require re-organisation: some funds may be needed for either travel by district AIEWs, and/or for additional district/cluster AIEW positions.

3.   Languages, Literacy and Numeracy

Indigenous languages

There were two items discussed in relation to Indigenous languages. First, there was concern that bilingual education, previously undertaken in some schools, had been discontinued. Parents/ carers and community members considered that bilingual education is essential in the early years of schooling, particularly in those areas where English is not spoken at home; and sought the reinstatement of bilingual education with English phased into learning at an earlier stage than had previously been done.

Second, should schools plan to introduce an Indigenous language (as a language other than English), it is essential to consult widely with local Indigenous parents/carers and community members, and include them in the planning and delivery of the preferred language.

English literacy and numeracy

Teachers and Indigenous parents/carers were concerned about the generally poor levels of English literacy and numeracy amongst Indigenous students. It was considered by some that Indigenous teachers might be better placed to encourage students in the development of these skills. Indigenous parents/carers stressed that teachers need to recognise the importance of Aboriginal English as a legitimate form of communication within Indigenous communities ('...part of our identity…'); and should not be corrected or seen as inferior. Standard Australian English is another form of communication used for different purposes. Students need to be taught the difference between the two forms of English, and helped to be selective in the use of each according to context.

RECOMMENDATION 3

    It is recommended that

    (a) A plan be developed to address teacher awareness of the importance of and use of Aboriginal English by Indigenous students, including the difference between Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English;

    (b) Bilingual education is continued or implemented where appropriate, but with an early introduction of English into classroom activities; and

    (c) Indigenous teachers as well as community members play a greater role in establishing Indigenous languages, and English literacy and numeracy competencies for Indigenous students within schools.

    Implementation and resource implications:
    Recommendations 3 a) and c) can be included in education systems' current literacy, numeracy and language strategies for incorporation into professional development programs for teaching within existing and future budgets.
    Recommendation 3 b) relates specifically to the Northern Territory, and other communities where appropriate.

4. Indigenous Studies

It was generally agreed, although with some exceptions, that Indigenous studies should be taught to all students in schools, both as a specific subject, and across the curriculum. Some parents/ carers considered that certain aspects of Indigenous cultures should not be taught; rather, these are part of the socialising process within families where information is passed on by parents to their children, and is not available to people outside the family or community. However, the introduction of broad aspects of Indigenous studies was stressed as an essential element of perceived acknowledgment and valuing of Indigenous cultures by schools (*The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, paragraph 3.3); and an important contributing factor towards the positive self-identity of Indigenous students in school contexts. There were differing opinions about who should teach Indigenous studies, with some interviewees stating a preference for Indigenous people to teach this subject. Indigenous studies should include topics such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island societies, history, cultures, belief systems, languages; contemporary issues; Indigenous concepts of place/ environment, visual and performing arts; and literature.

RECOMMENDATION 4

    It is recommended that

    Schools implement Indigenous studies as perspectives across curriculum in all years of formal schooling; and in the form of modules and discrete subjects in the secondary years of schooling.

    Implementation and resource implications: This recommendation conforms with National Goal 3.4, and with MCEETYA Strategy Priority 6, against which IESIP funds are allocated to education providers.

5. Teacher Education

Non-Indigenous teachers and teacher education

Teachers are pivotal to the development by Indigenous students of positive self-identity within school contexts. There is sometimes a mismatch between schools/teachers and Indigenous students in relation to teaching and learning which must be addressed urgently if student participation and outcomes are to improve. In some instances, Indigenous students spoke about teachers' negative attitudes towards them. Some teachers referred to their own lack of knowledge of Indigenous cultures, history, social structures and contemporary issues which, when translated into classroom practice, often led to inappropriate pedagogy and curriculum. Teachers who were reluctant to include Indigenous content in their teaching for fear of offending local Indigenous communities, at the same time recognised the importance of a school that is inclusive of the backgrounds of all students within the school community.

Teachers and Indigenous parents/carers referred to the need to include Indigenous content in both preservice teacher education courses, and professional development programs (*A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* Priority 6 [MCEETYA, 1995, p. 69])

While recognising the importance of Indigenous content in teacher education courses, the dilemma faced by universities is how this might be achieved within courses that are already very tightly timetabled, and within a climate of reduced budgets. As well as Indigenous content across existing teacher education courses, consideration should be given to the development of specialised professional development modules or units accredited within undergraduate and postgraduate education courses.

Teachers interviewed also suggested that examples of good practice in terms of Indigenous students' achievements and/or Indigenous studies programs should be publicised, or at least made accessible to other teachers, possibly through a specific Website such as NATSIEW <http://www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au/splash2.html>.

RECOMMENDATION 5

It is recommended that

(a) Teacher education institutions develop specialised modules and units–within undergraduate, post graduate and/or professional programs–focussing on Indigenous education for existing and prospective teachers. Modules or units might be on issues such as Indigenous health and schooling, Indigenous policies and programs, and Indigenous languages, –and include strategies on how to work with parents and the community, how to work with Indigenous students, and methods for successful teaching of subjects such as mathematics to Indigenous students.

(b) All teachers appointed to remote area Indigenous schools receive appropriate induction into the school and community, and have available to them appropriate support mechanisms throughout their tenure. It would be desirable, although not essential, that teachers appointed to remote area Indigenous schools have at least 12 months teaching experience or have undertaken a practical component of their teacher education program in an Indigenous school.

Implementation of recommendation 5 a) by teacher education institutions should be encouraged, particularly in view of National Goal 3.4 which requires the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. The creation of opportunities for practical experience in Indigenous schools is also the responsibility of teacher education institutions. Recommendation 5 b) (induction) is the responsibility of education systems, as is the placement in Indigenous schools of teachers with appropriate experience. There are **resource implications** for recommendation 5 a), and possibly for 5 b).

6.   Indigenous Teachers

A need for more Indigenous classroom teachers was also expressed in locations visited. Preferable, of course, were Indigenous teachers from local communities, but it was recognised that this is not always possible. It was stressed, however, that Indigenous teachers should be fully qualified, particularly in the development of English literacy and numeracy skills of Indigenous students. Where an applicant's prerequisite skills are not sufficient to meet the entry requirements of teacher training courses then alternative entry paths and support need to be offered.

RECOMMENDATION 6

It is recommended that

In order to increase the number of teachers available to teach Indigenous students, more flexible pathways be developed to enable articulation from lower level qualifications into teacher education. In particular, pathways should exist for AIEWs who have demonstrated both the potential and desire to become a teacher, and have demonstrated a firm commitment to assisting Indigenous students, to make a smooth transition to teaching. A campaign to promote the teaching profession to Indigenous Australians, and alternative modes of entry to it could be undertaken. Consideration could also be given to an incentive scheme to attract Indigenous people to the teaching profession.

Implementation should be undertaken by education systems in collaboration with teacher education institutions and Indigenous education consultative bodies. There are **resource implications**, particularly in relation to promotional strategies and incentive schemes.

7.   Vocational Education

Vocational subjects were seen as valuable for the development of employment skills. However, comment was made that subjects or courses offered need to correspond with available or planned employment in local areas, thus "further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community" (*The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*).

RECOMMENDATION 7

> **It is recommended that vocational education subjects within secondary schools be planned and offered in collaboration with local employers and Indigenous communities to enhance employment options for Indigenous students.**

> **Implementation and resource implications:** This recommendation supports the national commitment to collaboration outlined in the *National Goals for Schooling into the Twenty-First Century* (1999, p. 1): and should not require additional resourcing.

8.   Promoting Positive Images of Indigenous People

Commenting on ways in which Indigenous people were perceived

a) by non-Indigenous people

Some students spoke of negative stereotyping, prejudice and racism being exhibited in schools; they referred to some instances of being made to feel inferior to other students; that some teachers were neither responsive to, nor interested in their needs; and so on.

b) by Indigenous students

Those interviewed were asked to nominate role models for themselves and their peers. With few exceptions, sporting personalities were named. There is a history of Indigenous sporting personalities being held in high esteem by Indigenous people. The difficulty with this is twofold–not every Indigenous child/student will become a sporting personality; and the careers of sporting personalities are often short-lived. Indigenous children and adolescents need to know that role models vary–that a role model is not only a person who reaches the pinnacle of their chosen career, but can be a local Indigenous motor mechanic, their home/school liaison officer, an Indigenous nurse or health worker, an Indigenous teacher, artist, tertiary student, and so on. A distinct advantage of promoting local role models is that they are seen more often, and might agree to be mentors for Indigenous students. It is suggested that schools be encouraged to promote local role models for Indigenous students.

RECOMMENDATION 8

> **It is recommended that**

> **(a) A national campaign promoting positive images of Indigenous adults, adolescents and children (within a range of employment, education and/or leisure contexts) to the total Australian community be implemented to help remove some of the current negative perceptions of Indigenous people.**

> **(b) Schools be encouraged to promote local Indigenous people from a range of employment, education and leisure contexts, as role models for Indigenous students. This could be done by involving such role models in school activities and by having them present their experiences to students. Local communities could also encourage such role models to take on the additional role of mentor to individual students. As a mentor, a person who has demonstrated positive achievements in their community could provide encouragement and advice to a student in a way that promotes the value of education and training and helps develop career aspirations. They could**

also provide valuable guidance for students who have been identified as being at risk of dropping out of school.

Implementation and resource implications:
Recommendation 8 a) should be implemented by the Commonwealth government. Specific funds will be required for this initiative.
Recommendation 8 b) relates to local areas, and should be undertaken by individual schools in accordance with MCEETYA Strategy Priority 4, for which IESIP funds are allocated.

9.   School Opportunities

For the Indigenous students in the current study, positive aspects of self-identity mostly evolved from home, community, and school influences. In remote areas, in particular, there was a close relationship between the identity of young Indigenous people and the community in which they lived. Findings also indicated that teachers are influential in the development of positive self-identity for Indigenous students. However, access to secondary education for Indigenous students is lacking in some remote communities. This means that there is no opportunity for a relationship to develop between home, school and the community that may foster positive identity for students. A lack of secondary education facilities also means that many students will leave formal education early and this has implications for future work opportunities.

In some schools, Indigenous students spoke positively about the fact that there was a sizeable group of Indigenous students in the school with whom they could identify. It was also apparent that some schools has developed a structure and fostered teacher attitudes and relations with students that promoted a positive image of Indigenous students and allowed students to feel good about themselves, whereas other schools had not. It was noted in the consultations that practices such as 'National Testing' are often not conducive to an educationally sound environment for Indigenous students. In fact, it is evident that such practices only serve to lower self-esteem and self-efficacy of many Indigenous young people.

Consultations in some schools revealed that attendance for some Indigenous students is intermittent and that this may be for a variety of reasons. Whatever the reasons, this fact needs to be recognised and ensuing school-based practices that accommodate such attendance should be deployed.

<u>**RECOMMENDATION 9**</u>

It is recommended that

(a) Schools, particularly in rural and remote areas, consider a number of strategies to increase the access and participation of Indigenous students. This would include a more flexible approach to curriculum delivery and school organisation. In remote communities, schools should consider employing more flexible hours to encourage students to attend and to fit in with activities in the local community that may otherwise take them away from the classroom. There is also a need, overall, to provide greater access to secondary school for students in remote areas. Strategies such as multi-strand class groupings could be considered as a means of improving access.

(b) Parents should work with schools in rural and remote communities to encourage them to become an integral part of the community. For example, this may mean holding joint meetings in community halls or local clubs rather than on school premises, schools participating in community celebrations and activities when invited, and welcoming community participation in school planning activities.

(c) Communities and schools should encourage parents to play a greater role in promoting the value of education to their children and encouraging their participation in programs and activities organised by schools, and by attending ASSPA meetings regularly. In rural and remote communities where schools have the capacity to play a more central role in community activities and planning processes, parents can assist by becoming involved in committees and other organisational groups.

(d) Schools that have adopted a flexible approach to their organisation, curriculum or structure to the demonstrable benefit of students, or who have improved the educational outcomes within their communities by becoming involved in community planning or organisation, should be identified and promoted as models of good practice schools. Governments should take an active role in regularly publicising such achievements to other schools, and acknowledging such schools as models of best practice.

Implementation and resource implications:
Recommendation 9 a) is a system responsibility; it would require both additional resourcing and consultation with local Indigenous communities.
Recommendations 9 b) and c) relate to individual schools and local Indigenous communities. If additional resources are required, these would be minimal.
Recommendation 9 d) could be adopted by either entire education systems or by district/regional offices within those systems. Some additional funding may be required for promotion of good practice models.

Future Directions

The focus of this study, *Positive Self-Identity for Indigenous Students and its relationship to School Outcomes*, is both abstract and complex. A more detailed study over a longer period of time may produce information that could be used to guide schools' planning and program delivery in relation to Indigenous students and build on the current study in relation to the many positive and constructive actions being taken by schools. It could also explore the differences in Indigenous identity, according to geographical factors, that were apparent in this study. This way, if specific characteristics of Indigenous identity according to region and community are known, then school curriculum and structure can be tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous students within the various communities.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Given the lack of similar studies by which to measure Indigenous Australian self-identity, it is recommended that a subsequent study be undertaken over a longer period of time. A second study might revisit sites and individuals interviewed in this study; explore the self-identity of Indigenous students in relation to the way their community, whether it be urban or regional, perceives itself; and compare these findings to a greater extent with the relationship of positive self-identity and school outcomes for non-Indigenous students.

Implementation and resource implications: As a national study, this recommendation needs to be a Commonwealth government initiative, requiring specific funds.

Recommendations have not been listed in priority order. To do so would be to create the impression that one set of actions is of greater importance than another; whereas all actions recommended were perceived by interviewees to be essential elements for achieving and sustaining improved school outcomes for Indigenous students.

Top

59

References

Abrams, D. (1999). Social identity, social cognition, and the self: The flexibility and stability of self-categorization. In D. Abrams & M. Hogg (Eds.), *Social identity and social cognition* (pp. 42-70). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Ainley, J., Batten, M., Collins, C., & Withers, G. (1998). *Schools and the social development of young Australians*. Melbourne, Vic: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Davis, C., Woodberry, J., & Buckskin, P. (1995). *Ara Kuwaritjakutu Project: Towards a new way, Stage 3*. A research project into the working conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers. South Melbourne, Vic: Australian Education Union.

Balistreri, E., Busch-Ressnagel, N.A., & Geisinger, K.F. (1995). Development and preliminary validation of the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire. *Journal of Adolescence, 18*, 179-192.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanisms in human agency. *American Psychologist*, *37*, 122-147.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Vittorio Caprara, G., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development, 67*, 1206-1222.

Baumeister, R.F., & Muraven, M. (1996). Identity as adaptation to social, cultural, and historical context. *Journal of Adolescence, 19*, 405-416.

Behrens, J.T. (1997). Does the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale measure racial identity? *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 44,* 3-12.

Bennion, L.D., & Adams, G.R. (1986). A revision of the Extended Version of the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status: An identity instrument for use with late adolescents.

Beresford, Q. (1993). Aboriginal youth: Social issues and policy responses in WA. *Youth Studies Australia, 12,* 25-30.

Berry, J.W. (In press). Aboriginal cultural identity. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*.

Boulton-Lewis, G.M., Marton, F., Lewis, D., & Wilss, L.A. (submitted). Learning in formal and informal contexts: Conceptions and strategies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students. Submitted to *Learning and Instruction*.

Boulton-Lewis, G.M., Neill, H., & Halford, G. S. (1987). Information processing and mathematical knowledge in Aboriginal Australian children in south east Queensland. *Australian Aboriginal Studies, 2*, 63-65.

Byrne, A., Buchanan, K., Grant, R., & Beyers, S. (1997). *Evaluation of ABSTUDY 1994*. Report 1/98, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs Analysis and Evaluation Division: Education Evaluation Section.

Carter, R.T., & Goodwin, A.L. (1994). Racial identity and education. In L. Darling-Hammond, (Ed.), *Review of research in education, 20* (pp. 291-336). Washington: American Educational Research Association.

Choney, S.B., & Behrens, J.T. (1996). Development of the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form (ORAS-P). In G.R. Sodowsky & J. Impara (Eds.), *Multicultural assessment in counseling and clinical psychology* (pp. 225-240). Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.

Cole, T., & Sapp, G.L. (1988). Stress, locus of control, and achievement in high school seniors. *Psychological Reports*, *63,* 355-359.

Commonwealth of Australia (1989, 1993). *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*. Canberra, Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Corno, L. (1992). Encouraging students to take responsibility for learning and performance. *The Elementary School Journal, 93, 69*-83.

Cross, W.E. (1971). The Negro-to-Black conversion experience: Toward a psychology of Black liberation. *Black World, 21,* 13-27.

Day, A. (1994). Looking toward high school: Aboriginal students and parents make choices. In S. Harris & M. Malin (Eds.), *Aboriginal kids in urban classrooms* (pp. 101-116). Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.

Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. (1999). *Equity in higher education.* Occasional Paper Series, 99-A, Higher Education Division, Canberra, ACT.

Eades, D. (1993). Aboriginal English. *Primary English Teaching Association*, Newton, NSW.

Edwards, W. (1988). *An introduction to Aboriginal societies*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Fanshawe, J.P. (1989). Personal characteristics of effective teachers of adolescent Aborigines. *The Aboriginal Child at School, 17*(4), 35-48.

Forrest, S. (1998). That's my mob: Aboriginal identity. In G. Partington (Ed.), *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education* (p. 96-105). Katoomba, NSW: Social Sciences Press.

Fotiadis, K. (1995). Multiculturalism in education: An Australian perspective. *Multicultural Teaching, 13,* 35-37.

Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1997). 'Tis the season. *Learning, Successful Teaching Today, 26*(1), 27-29.

Gergen, K. J. (1982). From self to science: What is there to know? In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self* (Vol. 1, pp.129-149). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Gibson, S. (1993). Culture and learning: A divisive link. *The Aboriginal Child at School, 21,* 43-51.

Girdano, D.A., & Everly, G.S. (1986). *Controlling stress and tension: A holistic approach.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Groome, H.J. (1995). Towards improved understandings of Aboriginal young people. *Youth Studies Australia, 14,* 17-21.

Groome, H., & Edwardson, T. (1996). *Urban Aboriginal Young People and Identity*.

Groome, H., & Hamilton, A. (1995). *Meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal adolescents.* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Grotevant, H.D. (1987). Toward a process model of identity formation. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 2,* 203-222.

Harris, S. (1994). Reasons for optimism in teaching Aboriginal children in urban classes. In S. Harris & M. Malin (Eds.), *Aboriginal kids in urban classrooms* (pp. 124-128). Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.

Harris, S. (1984). Aboriginal learning styles and formal schooling. *The Aboriginal Child at School, 12,* 3-23.

Harslett, M., Harrison, B., Godfrey, J., Partington, G., & Richer, K. (1999). Participation by Indigenous parents in school education. *Unicorn, 25,* 60-77.

Harter, S. (1982). The perceived competence scale for children. *Child Development, 53*, 87-97.

Harter, S., & Monsour, A. (1992). Development analysis of conflict caused by opposing attributes in the adolescent self-portrait. *Developmental Psychology, 28,* 251-260.

Hattie, J.H. (1992). *Self-concept*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Helms, J.E. (Ed.). (1990). *Black and White racial identity attitudes: Theory, research, and practice.* Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Helms, J.E. (1984). Toward a theoretical model of the effects of race on counseling: A Black and White model. *The Counseling Psychologist, 12*, 153-165.

Helms, J.E., & Carter, R.T. (1990). Development of the White Racial Identity Inventory. In J.E. Helms (Ed.), *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 67-80). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Herbert, J., Anderson, L., Price, D., & Stehbens, C. (1998). "*If they learn us right. . .*" A study of the factors affecting the attendance, suspension and exclusion of Aboriginal students in secondary schools. This project was funded by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs and the Australian Youth Foundation.

Hudspith, S., & Williams, A. (1994). Enhancing Aboriginal identity and self-esteem in the classroom. In S. Harris & M. Malin (Eds.), *Aboriginal kids in urban classrooms* (pp. 28-36). Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.

Hughes, P. (1987). *Aboriginal culture and learning styles: A challenge for academics in Higher Education institutions.* Publications Office, University of New England.

Jourard, S.M. (1974). *Healthy personality: An approach from the viewpoint of humanistic psychology*. New York: Macmillan.

Kwok, D.C., & Lai, D.W. (1993). The self-perception of competence by Canadian and Chinese Children. Paper presented at the *Annual Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association,* Montreal, Quebec, May (Eric Document Number ED358963).

Malcolm, I.G. (1998). "You gotta talk the proper way." Language and education. In G. Partington (Ed.), *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education* (p. 117-146). Katoomba, NSW: Social Sciences Press.

Malin, M. (1998). They listen and they've got respect: Culture and pedagogy. In G. Partington (Ed), *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*. Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press, pp. 245-273.

Marcia, J. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*, 551-558.

Markus, H.R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98,* 224-253.

Markus, H., & Wurf, E. (1987). The dynamic self-concept: A social psychological perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 38*, 299-337.

Marsh, H.W. (1988). *The Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ): A theoretical and empirical basis for the measurement of multiple dimensions of preadolescent self-concept: A test manual and a research monograph.* San Antonio: The Psychological Corporation.

Marsiglia, F.F., & Halasa, O. (1992). Ethnic identity and school achievement as perceived by a group of selected mainland Puerto Rican students. Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, San Francisco, CA, April 20-24. (Eric Document Number ED 348 453).

McCormack, P.M. (1997). Parents and teachers: Partners in whole-person formation. Paper presented at the *Annual Conference and Exposition of the National Catholic Educational Association, 94th*. Minneapolis, April 1-4. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 413 109).

McInerney, D.M., & McInerney, V. (1998). *Educational psychology: Constructing learning*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Meeus, W. (1992). Towards a psychosocial analysis of adolescent identity: An evaluation of the epigenetic theory (Erikson) and the identity status model (Marcia). In W. Meeus, M. De Goede, W. Kox, & K. Hurrelmann (Eds.), *Adolescence, careers, and cultures* (pp. 55-76). New York: De Gruyter.

Meeus, W., & Dekovic, M. (1995). Identity development, parental and peer support in adolescence: Results of a national survey. *Adolescence, 30,* 931-944.

Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. (1995). *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002*.

Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (1999) *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*. <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/nationalgoals/natgoals.htm>

Munns, G. (1998). "They just can't hack that." Aboriginal students, their teachers and responses to schools and classrooms. In G. Partington (Ed.), *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education* (p. 171-187). Katoomba, NSW: Social Sciences Press.

Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Girgus, J. S., & Seligman M. (1986). Learned helplessness in children: A longitudinal study of depression, achievement, and explanatory style. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*, 435-442.

Ogbu, J. (1988). Black education: A cultural-ecological perspective. In H. P. McAdoo (Ed.), *Black families* (pp.169-186). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Parham, T.A., & Helms, J.E. (1981). The influence of Black students' racial identity attitudes on preferences for counselor's race. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28*, 250-257.

Paris, S.G., & Newman, R.S. (1990). Developmental aspects of self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychologist, 25*, 87-102.

Partington, G. (1998). Shaping Indigenous education. In G. Partington (Ed.), *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education* (p. 75). Katoomba, NSW: Social Sciences Press.

Partington, G., Godfrey, J., & Harrison, B. (1997). Perspectives on retention of Aboriginal students. *Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education*, Brisbane, 30 November - 3 December.

Partington, G., & McCudden, V. (1992). *Ethnicity and education*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.

Pedersen, D.M. (1994). Identification of levels of self-identity. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 78*, 1155-1167.

Phillips, V. (1992). Language, cultural identity and empowerment in the dominant culture. *Aboriginal Child at School, 20*, 25-30.

Ponterotti, J.G., & Wise, S.L. (1987). Construct validity study of the racial identity attitude scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 34,* 218-223.

Price, B., & Price, D. (1998). Unheard voices. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues, 1,* 15-23.

Purdie, N.M., & Hattie, J.A. (1995). The effect of motivation and training on approaches to learning and self-concept. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 65,* 227-235.

Ramsay, P.G., Vold, E.B., & Williams, L.R. (1989). *Multicultural education: A source book*. New York: Garland.

Reaburn, S. (1993). "*Aboriginal students get lost . . .*" Executive summary and recommendations on the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on schools and the impact of schools on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Darwin, Palmerston and rural centres.

Rogers, C. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80s.* London: Charles E. Merrill.

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. (1991). *Regional Report of Inquiry into Underlying Issues in Western Australia, Vol. 1*, Commissioner Pat Dodson.

Scott, W.J. (1992). *Identity factors of Aboriginal students in New South Wales Schools*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Newcastle, Australia.

Shavelson, R.J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G.C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research, 46*, 407-441.

Sigelman, C.K., & Shaffer, D.R. (1995). *Life-span human development.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Steele, C.M. (1992). Race and the schooling of African Americans. *Atlantic, 269,* 68-78.

Strauss, A.L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Synott, J., & Whatman, S. (1998). United to the sea and land: Cultures, histories and education in the Torres Strait. In G. Partington (Ed.), *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education* (pp. 55-74). Katoomba, NSW: Social Sciences Press.

Tajfel, H. (1982). *Social identity and intergroup relations*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Treuba, H. (1990). Mainstream and minority cultures: A Chicano perspective. In G. & L. Spindler (Eds.), *The American cultural dialogue and its transmission* (pp. 122-143). London: The Falmer Press.

West, L. (1994). Cultural behaviour, conflict and resolution. In S. Harris & M. Malin (Eds.), *Aboriginal kids in urban classrooms* (pp. 7-19). Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.

Yunupingu, M. (1995). *National review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Zimmerman, B.J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 81,* 329-339.

Appendices

A. Summary of methodology for consultations

The consultations were conducted with a national sample of Indigenous community members (students, parents/carers, teachers, and AIEWs) and non-Indigenous teachers, and a small sample of non-Indigenous students.

The broad objective of the consultations was to gain information and insights in relation to Indigenous people's perceptions of positive self-identity as it applies to their young people, particularly in relation to school attendance and outcomes.

Consultations were conducted in all States and Territories. Sites for the consultations were selected so as to ensure that a range of community types and contexts were included. For example, urban, rural and remote areas were visited; so also were preschool, primary and secondary schools; schools with large and small proportions of Indigenous students; and Indigenous community schools. Schools from all three school sectors were represented.

Three sets of data were collected. The first and major data set pertains to consultations conducted with students, parents/carers, and members of school staff in all States and Territories over a five week period. At the same time as these consultations were conducted, a small set of self-concept survey data was collected from both Indigenous *and* non-Indigenous students. Finally, and at the request of the members of the project Steering Committee, supplementary consultations were conducted with students in four schools, two of which were visited during the initial consultations. The purpose of these consultations was to consult with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to provide a point of comparison on issues raised in the first consultations and in the survey data

A total of 44 schools participated in the main consultations. Consultations were held also with Education Officers in three of the State/Territory and Catholic Education Departments.

The following tables gives details pertaining to the characteristics of the study population for the main consultations.

Participants in the Main Consultations

Students	Indigenous staff (Teachers and AIEWs)	Non-Indigenous staff	Parents/carers
623	97	143	75

Number of Schools by Sector Type

State	Catholic	Independent
31	8	3

Number of Schools by Level of School

Primary	Secondary	Combined
22	12	9

Number of Schools by Location

Urban	Rural	Remote
21	17	4

Number of Schools by Proportion of Indigenous Students

Less than 10%	10-50%	More than 50 %
12	18	12

Supplementary consultations were conducted with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in four schools in New South Wales and Queensland. Three of the schools were located in urban areas, whilst the fourth was a rural school; two of the schools had participated in the initial consultations. In total, 41 students were consulted, with the Indigenous sample consisting of 20 students. Thirty students were of primary school age and 11 students were of secondary school age. These consultations were conducted because analysis of the small set of self-concept questionnaire data obtained from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students led to the emergence of several anomalies with respect to aspects of self-identity in both groups of students. For instance, although the expected higher Family self-concept scores were obtained for the Indigenous students when compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts, contrary to popular wisdom the Indigenous students also obtained higher School self-concept scores. Thus, the purpose of the supplementary consultations, though very limited in scope, was to obtain comparative data that would enrich our understanding of some of the important issues concerning self-identity in Indigenous young people.

Focus groups/interviews

The consultations consisted of both individual interviews and small group interviews (focus groups). The focus groups were structured around a common protocol designed to investigate aspects of self-identity among Indigenous students. Questions were posed that centred on issues identified in the literature as being important considerations in relation to the development of positive self-identity. Issues included those related to (a) the school environment (e.g., teachers, curriculum, structures, discipline, achievement); (b) current and future expectations about self (e.g., career goals and ambitions); (c) role models; (d) kinship and relationships; (e) peers; (f) important life events and experiences; (g) things that have strengthened one's identity; (h) things that have diminished one's identity; and (i) the wider community.

Originally the focus group protocol was constructed around an imaginary scenario and this was trialed with a small group of parents/carers at a community meeting, and with students from the same community who attended a small independent school in Queensland. Based on the experience of the consultations, some changes were made to the previously planned approach. It was decided not to use the imaginary scenario, but to proceed with direct questions in the focus groups

The major consultations were conducted over a five week period towards the end of the first semester of the school year. Consultations were conducted by five teams of people, each team

66

consisting of two facilitators who had been trained in the use of the consultation protocol. Teams for the consultations in each of the States and Territories are listed in Appendix C. Before commencing the focus groups, facilitators briefly explained to the participants the background to, and purpose of, the project. Participants were assured that all information provided by them was confidential and that individuals or schools would not be identified in any reports that emanated from the project. Conversations were recorded (written notes and/or audio-taped) with the participants' consent.

Self-concept instrument

One of the aims of the project was to explore ways to assess or measure positive self-identity. In the review of the literature, we had located a number of measures of self-identity and self concept but none of these was considered in its entirety to be appropriate for the population of students in the current study. Instead, to cater for the large variation in both age and English literacy skills of students in the current study, a simplified version of a self-concept instrument was constructed.

The instrument consisted of 14 questions representing four components of self-beliefs that had been identified as playing an important role in the development of the identities of young Indigenous people. The factors identified in *How I Feel About Me* (see Appendix B) concern General Liking of Self (items 1, 2, 7, and 8), Sense of Personal Efficacy (items 3, 9, and 10), Family (items 4, 5, and 6), and School (items 11, 12, 13, and 14). Items in the instrument were drawn from several other widely used measures of self-concept and self-esteem (The Self Description Questionnaire, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, Song and Hattie Self-Concept Scale).

It was not possible within the specified timeframe of the project to trial the instrument in a methodologically sound way. Nevertheless, items such as those in *How I Feel About Me* have been used in other instruments with students from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, including, for instance, African American, Korean, Nepalese, Japanese, and Filipino students. Thus, this suggests that at least a modicum of insight could be gained from the responses provided by students.

Data analysis

The qualitative analysis of the consultation data was achieved by employing the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method involves a series of iterative steps in which data are read and reread, and words and statements are grouped and regrouped on the basis of similarities and differences until they are reduced to a set of themes and categories that encompass and summarise the data. The identification of themes and categories can also be guided by sources external to the data—in this case, we were guided by (a) the literature on self-identity and related constructs; and (b) the nine questions posed by the project Steering Committee.

The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data was achieved with the use of multivariate analysis of variance techniques. The two groups of students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) were compared on their scores for each of the four aspects of self-concept assessed—General Liking of Self, Sense of Personal Efficacy, Family, and School. Within-group analysis of variance was used to determine differences between the four dimensions of self-concept for each of the groups.

B.   Self-Concept Questionnaire

How I Feel About Me

1 = **NOT true**
2 = A little bit **NOT true**
3 = A little bit **true**
4 = **True**

	1	2	3	4

1.   I like the person I am ………………………………………

2.   I am a good person ……………………………………………

3.   Most things I do, I do well ……………………………………

4.   When I think about my family, I feel happy ………………….

5.   My family are good people ………………………………….

6.   I am proud of my family …………………………………….

7.   I like the way I look ………………………………………….

8.   I am proud of myself ………………………………………….

9.   I can do things as well as most people my age . ………………

10.   If I really try, I can do almost anything that I want to do………

11.   When I think about school, I feel happy ………………………

12.   I am good at my school work …………………………………

13.   My teachers like me ……………………………………………

14.   I like coming to school …………………………………….

C.   Consultation teams and areas visited

Major consultations

Australian Capital Territory
   Kaye Price and Margo Weir

Central Australia
   Andrew Gunstone and Jacinta Price

New South Wales
   Gillian Boulton-Lewis and Sharolyn Johnson

Northern Territory
South Australia
Western Queensland
   John Fanshawe and Muriel Bin Dol

North Queensland, Torres Strait
   Nola Purdie and Bill Lowah

Tasmania
   Kaye Price and Rosemary Ransom

Victoria
   Andrew Gunstone and Ngarra Murray

Western Australia
   Nola Purdie and Eva Hill

Supplementary consultations

New South Wales
   Gillian-Boulton Lewis

Queensland
   Muriel Bin Dol

Top

D. Schools visited

Australian Capital Territory

St Francis of Assisi Primary School, Calwell
Arawang Primary School, Waramanga
Erindale College and Youth Centre, Wanniassa
Holy Rosary Primary School, Watson
Gugan Gulwan Centre, Red Hill

New South Wales

Bourke High School, Burke
Doonside Public School, Doonside
Glebe High School, Glebe
St Ignatius School, Burke
St Therese's Infant School, Wilcannia
Wilcannia Central School, Wilcannia
Karabar High School, Queanbeyan

Northern Territory

Sadadeen Primary School, Darwin
Yuendumu Community Education Centre, Yuendumu
Yipirinya Primary School, Alice Springs
Alice Springs High School, Alice Springs
Braitling Primary School, Alice Springs
Kormilda College, Darwin
Malak Primary School, Darwin
Holy Family School, Karama

Queensland

Cooktown State School and Secondary Department, Cooktown
Horn Island State Primary School, Horn Island
Mt Isa Central Primary School, Mt Isa
Mt Isa State High School, Mt Isa
New Farm State Primary School, Brisbane
Parramatta State Primary School, Cairns
Sunnybank State High School, Brisbane
The Ryan Catholic College, Townsville
Thursday Island State High School, Thursday Island
Wangetti Education Centre, Wangetti

South Australia

Port Lincoln High School, Port Lincoln
Le Fevre High School, Semaphore South
Enfield Primary School, Enfield

Tasmania

Tasmanian Open Learning Centre, Hobart
Margate Primary School, Margate

Rokeby High School, Rokeby
Sacred Heart College, New Town
St Pauls' Primary School, Bridgewater

Victoria
Preston East Primary School, East Preston
Gowrie Street Primary School, Shepparton
Woolum Bellum Koorie Open Door Education Campus, Morwell

Western Australia
Hamilton Senior High School, Hamilton Hill
Middle Swan Primary School, Middle Swan
Cable Beach Primary School, Broome
St Mary's College, Broome
La Grange Remote Community School, Bidyadanga

Top