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1. Introduction

The overall purpose of the project, Walking Together To Make A Difference, is to explore and present a rich picture of Worawa Aboriginal College, including adults’ and students’ understanding of nurturing a strong sense of cultural identity through embedding the values Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour in two-way schooling processes, where Aboriginal culture and mainstream Australian culture, combine in a Model of Learning. The fundamental research question is: What factors do students and adults at Worawa Aboriginal College understand as assisting the nurturing of a strong sense of cultural identity through connectedness, empowerment and learning in their life at school? In answering this question we identify ways in which the values Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour relate to the concepts of Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning as described in the celebration of Worawa Aboriginal College’s thirtieth anniversary presentation, Building On A Dream. We demonstrate how respectful relationships are built at the College and how these relationships enable learning through participation, contribution and the setting of high and achievable expectations, so as students learn about and are sustained and advanced, in both traditional and contemporary cultures.

Definitions of Culture, Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning derived from the Literature Review are:

Culture: the characteristics of Aboriginal people defined by their connection to people and place, manifested in a contemporary context.

Connectedness: a sense of belonging to a learning community.

Empowerment: the ability to act with confidence in order to direct one’s own life within the context of a learning community.

Learning: a complex co-emergent process of holistic development enabled through the construction of meaning, taking place within a community that is dynamic and robust in adapting to changing circumstances.

Data for this rich picture of the College were generated before and throughout this research project. Data specifically for this project were generated between December 2013 and December 2014. Exemplars generated during and before this date have also been used. Interviews for the project were conducted with two Elders, three members of the Board of Directors, the Executive Director, Principal, and the Deputy Principal, the Head of Boarding, three house parents, two wellbeing staff members, one community liaison worker, 10 teachers, one teacher aide and five external professionals, who provide services to the members of the College community. Ten students were interviewed; additional written and spoken material from some of these students and another past student are included in the generated data. It is relevant to note that Aunty Lois Peeler is both Executive Director and Principal of Worawa Aboriginal College. In the following material these titles are used interchangeably, as appropriate for each section.

The relationship between the key concepts: Empowerment, Connectedness and Learning, used to organise the review of literature in Section 3 and the Worawa
values of Relationship, Responsibility Respect and Rigour, is made clear in the organisation of this section and through the discussion of the exemplars and data. Culture, which is fundamental to all discussion, is treated explicitly and in context. The values whilst discussed separately for the purposes of this report, are acknowledged as being interrelated and interdependent in the Worawa learning ecology. The organisation of the rich picture of students and adults nurturing and celebrating culture, building respectful, responsible, empowering relationships and engaging in learning that is rigorous, demonstrates that:

1. Students are connected and empowered through:
   - Culture and values
   - Relationships that are respectful and responsible
   - Rigorous learning within a two-way model that is holistic and personalised

2. Staff members are connected and empowered through
   - Culture and values
   - Relationships that are respectful and responsible
   - Learning that supports a two-way model that is holistic and personalised

This rich picture also depicts the challenges confronted by students and staff members.

It must be noted here, that Relationship, one of the Worawa values, is conceptual and therefore, is expressed in the singular. For the purposes of this project in the discussion of Culture, the singular is retained. Where we discuss relationships between students, and adults and students the plural form is appropriate. This enables specific data to be generated concerning students’ learning to interact with other people and it is consistent with the expression of student relationships in *Building On A Dream*.

Specific material for this project was generated through observation and interviews. Material from existing exemplars is either, described and analysed in designated sections or in other sections as appropriate. Existing exemplars include videos on the Worawa College website, Newletters promulgated each term of the school year, The ‘Worawa Way’ booklet on addressing wellbeing at Worawa and entries on the Worawa College Facebook page; this page is constantly updated with material depicting student activities.

### 1.1 The College

Worawa Aboriginal College is Victoria’s only independent Aboriginal community school and the only Aboriginal girls’ boarding school in Australia. The College is located 60 kilometres from Melbourne on 65 hectares in the Yarra Valley that once formed part of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station. The Governing Body of the College is a Board of Directors, of which the majority of members are Aboriginal. Worawa was established, through the vision of Hyllus Maris, to provide an education for Aboriginal students with a focus on Aboriginal teachings and cultural values, academic achievement and the development of practical skills important to everyday life and employment. It was also a response to the needs of Aboriginal adolescents.
and the difficulties these young people experience in the mainstream education system. Hyllus Maris said:

\[ \text{No people can live without their culture. Culture is the basis of their whole society.} \]

and that:

\[ \text{Worawa College came into being to teach Aboriginal children their own culture and also to teach them the tools they needed to live in white society.} \]

(\url{http://vimeo.com/116375031})

Worawa is a full boarding school catering for Indigenous girls in the middle years of schooling, Years 7-10. In particular, the College caters for young women whose families have experienced one or more of the recognised ‘major stress events’ common to generations of disadvantaged Indigenous communities. Because of this, Worawa is registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), as a specialist school. As a trauma-informed school, Worawa works to decrease the proportion of destructive behaviours exhibited in their students, by the implementation of appropriate strategies for prevention and intervention.

Worawa’s holistic approach to education includes programs designed to support the academic, emotional, cultural and social development of girls who have had negative experiences that have impacted on their ability to focus on education. Specialised attention and personalised learning address individual needs and ensure each student has the opportunity to progress academically, socially, emotionally, culturally and spiritually. The Worawa Education Program is based on the concept of “two-way” learning. This involves the Learning and Teaching Program addressing the Learning Areas of mainstream curriculum whilst taking into account Aboriginal culture, values, spiritual beliefs and learning styles. Importantly, College academic and residential staff members, management and the Governing Body are jointly committed to the ‘Walking Together’ ethos, enriching the College program through shared wisdom and knowledge.

It was the Founder Hyllus Maris’ vision that young Aboriginal people receive an education that equips them to capitalise upon any and all opportunities life may present them and to do so in the full and positive knowledge of who they are as Aboriginal people. The current vision for the College, based on Hyllus Maris’ vision, is described more fully by the current Principal Aunty Lois Peeler (AM) on the College website. \url{http://vimeo.com/53545179}

1.1.1 Student Population

In Term 1, 2014 there were 61 students enrolled at the College. Worawa students come from urban, regional and remote communities across Australia. Families and communities see the benefits of both an all-Aboriginal school and a boarding school that values Learning and Teaching in an Aboriginal framework.
Many of the young people who present at Worawa have experienced disadvantage and a dysfunctional family life in community or other contexts. Families are means tested and student’s may qualify for the away from home (AFH) rate of ABSTUDY. Worawa Aboriginal College and Clontarf College in Western Australia are the two schools in Australia designated as a ‘Special Assistance School’ with boarding facilities.

Worawa Aboriginal College provides families and communities with the choice of an education in a different place, and in a safe and supportive, respectful learning environment. As one parent stated of her daughter:

> She needs to go to a school away from problems in town. It's hard for bush kids to have a good education because there is no high school here in community. I hope she will do well and have good English when she comes back.

Families and communities also select the College for the education of their young people because it offers a holistic education program. Jan, a grandparent, reflected this when she said:

> Only Worawa offers the holistic approach, the opportunities for the students to explore the different areas social and academic life that they might enjoy later, in a safe well-guided and moral atmosphere, in terms of learning citizenship as well as history as well as all the cultural aspect of their lives.

### 2. Connected and Empowered Through Culture and The Worawa Way

The Worawa Aboriginal College website links culture to country and place, identity and learning. The building of self-esteem and consequent pride in being strong, Aboriginal young women, who make a difference in the world, is a goal for all students:

> Worawa is located on culturally significant land of great natural beauty. The Worawa Dreaming Trail is a focal point for the celebration of Aboriginal culture and tradition. Students learn about Aboriginal technology and science as well as the history of the Aboriginal tribes and clans connected to this important site. Access to the river and natural bushland provides for the teaching of cultural knowledge from Elders.

> Worawa assists Aboriginal students to establish themselves in Australian society with a strong sense of Aboriginal identity and self-esteem. With hundreds of Aboriginal students attending from across Australia, many have overcome significant barriers to achieve their chosen goals. We, at Worawa, take immense pride in assisting our students to reach their full potential.
Emphasis is placed on threading culture through the curriculum and involving Aboriginal artists and other role models through a series of activities. The girls who pass through Worawa become strong and independent women, strong in their culture and Aboriginal identity and ready to take their place in the world.

### 2.1 Nurturing and Celebrating Culture

The evidence in this section is consonant with the data generated by Sarra (2011), as all members of the Worawa community, as did those in Sarra’s study, express the importance of Aboriginal people having a sense of pride in who they are, respecting their Elders, acknowledging, honouring and attending to the needs of family and locating people in the context of their family, as well as connections to the land and spirituality. Janz & Sumner, (2013) argue that school connectedness for Aboriginal students is also strongly related to “taking part in cultural events, learning cultural stories and protocols, being involved with community and Elders and taking pride in one’s culture” (p. 4).

#### 2.1.1 Knowledge from the Council of Elders

The Council of Elders of Worawa Aboriginal College are:
Aunty Zeta Thomson, Aunty Fay Carter, Uncle Max Eulo, Uncle Rod Briggs,
Aunty Lois Peeler, Aunty Lillian Tamiru, Aunty Diane Singh, Aunty Pam Pedersen,
Uncle Pat Farrant and Aunty Daphne Milward.

Worawa ensures that students are afforded the opportunity to interact with Elders in respectful ways that demonstrate an appreciation of their role as culture-bearers and oral historians in the community. Aboriginal knowledges across the curriculum are fundamental to the ‘Worawa Way’. Elders bring with them first-hand knowledge and experience of Aboriginal cultural values, history and life experience. Whilst nurturing the pride and identity of each student’s attachment to the Country from which they originate, students also learn to develop respect, knowledge, understanding and the history of the Kulin Nation and the land of the Wurundjeri n which the College is situated. This sense of ‘spirit and place’ leads them to understand the world around them; especially the awareness of processes related to the identification of places of cultural significance such as Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve and the place of the Indigenous community in the local, regional, state, national and international political and economic systems.

The Council of Elders:

- Supports the College and students by positively reinforcing individual and community values
- Facilitates the passing on of cultural knowledge across the generations, gaining first-hand knowledge, celebrating and revitalising Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Fosters pride in Aboriginal identity and respect for community Elders and the
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traditional leadership structures of Aboriginal society
- Enables alienated Aboriginal youth to re-connect to culture and develop an understanding and appreciation of their history and heritage
- Encourages future leaders and development of personal values
- Strengthens links between the College, students and communities
- Provides encouragement and motivation for students to remain at school, emphasising the value of learning and contributing to strategies to improve student retention rates
- Provides a focus on values leadership, cultural identity, positive self-esteem and facilitates entry to Pathways to Womanhood to support a healthy transition to adulthood
- Utilises the principles of Aboriginal values of Relationship, Responsibility, Respect.
- Increases awareness of Aboriginal culture in the broader community and creates opportunities for the development of harmonious and respectful relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth.

The Worawa Council of Elders has a commitment to 'Walking Together', bringing together Aboriginal knowledge, values and pedagogy and academic leadership. This enriches the College program through shared wisdom and knowledge. Aunty Lois Peeler AM, as well as being the Resident Elder, is the Executive Director and the Principal of Worawa Aboriginal College, Aunty Zeta Thomson is a member of the College staff and teaches in the Cultural Program. Included here is a brief description of how Aunty Lois and Aunty Zeta have ‘walked together to make a difference’ over many years and in many settings. Interviews were conducted with Aunty Fay Carter and Aunty Diane Singh. The questions they were asked directly related to the research question (Appendix M 1.). Their reflections on these questions are included in this section.

2.1.1.1 Resident Elder: Aunty Lois Peeler AM
Aboriginal perspectives are embedded in all aspects of Worawa College’s operations under the cultural leadership of Executive Director and Resident Elder Aunty Lois Peeler AM. As well as extensive knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history, Aunty Lois has well-developed skills, having worked in and initiated the development of senior positions in both the State and Federal Public Service and has been a senior advisor to government and the public service on Aboriginal issues, at a regional, state and national level, in a range of sectors. Aunty Lois’ vast experience, knowledge, versatility and adaptability have enabled her to cross boundaries between industry sectors and between community, government, non-government, corporate and philanthropic sectors, to make valuable contributions in all areas. Aunty Lois comes from a family that for generations has been in the forefront of the Australian Aboriginal movement for social, political and legal equality. She has continued the tradition of her mother Geraldine Briggs (AO), aunt Margaret Tucker (OAM) and uncle Sir Douglas Nicholls (KCVO, OBE, JP) in representing Aboriginal Australia in national forums including national Aboriginal women’s peak bodies. These have included:

- Elected representative of the national Indigenous governing body Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) for four consecutive terms (1990-2004), and two terms as Chairperson, ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council 1994-1999. Her achievements in this capacity included developing policies and programs for Aboriginal and community advancement, highlighting the need and securing resources to increase Indigenous employment and economic development, and involvement in the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement with the Department of Justice.

- Active involvement since late 1960s in Indigenous civil, political and legal rights bodies including:

  ‘Victorian Women’s Advisory Council’.
  ‘Koorie Women Mean Business’, founding member.

Aunty Lois communicates to all members of the Worawa community and the wider education community, the importance of cultural identity in the promotion of student well being, self-esteem and academic success.

2.1.1.2 Aunty Zeta Thomson

Aunty Zeta Thomson is a descendant of the Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta peoples in the Northern region of Victoria, along the Murray River. Aunty Zeta is Yorta Yorta on her mother's side and Wurundjeri on her father's. She was the first Victorian Aboriginal painter to have work exhibited at Melbourne Museum's Bunjilaka Gallery. Her paintings are inspired by the Yorta-Yorta stories she was told as a child by her mother and grandmother. Aunty Zeta’s work has been commissioned for various government and corporate projects and is one of 12 artworks that feature in the 2015
Aboriginal Art Calendar, published by Melbourne company ‘Brown Trout’.

Aunty Zeta says connection to Culture and Language is fundamental if Aboriginal people are to be proudly connected to their heritage:

*Our culture, our language and our heritage make us who we are. A lot of Aboriginal people have not always been connected to their culture and their heritage. So it’s important for that understanding to be instilled in our families. Our people are empowered by their culture and heritage when they are strong in their lives; it makes them proud.*

Aunty Zeta has been involved in Aboriginal affairs all her life. Through ministerial appointment, she is an appointed Independent Prison Visitor, who provides cultural support to incarcerated Indigenous prisoners. She is Cultural Advisor at the ‘Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place Health Service, Victoria’. In this role she and Aunty Colleen Marion developed a program for Indigenous people in the Australian Prison System. The program connects the participants with their Aboriginal culture and with relevant medical and counseling services. Men's and women's family circles are central to the program and it is here participants connect with their Aboriginality and are encouraged to speak openly about issues that have led them to their current position in life. They also learn their history, cultural practices, including painting, dance and craft, and benefit from the shared wisdom in the group. A literacy course is part of the program. This program proved popular with participants who were very grateful for the work carried out by Aunty Zeta and the late Uncle Reg Blow, acknowledged as Elders of the mob.

Language is part of Culture and Aunty Zeta was also involved with the Malmsbury Language Program that was run by the Victorian Aboriginal Language Corporation for Languages (VACL). This was a very worthwhile program for youth who had come into contact with the Justice system; unfortunately, despite the enthusiasm of the participants, it ended through lack of funding.
The program taught the participants the language of the traditional owners of the land on which Malmsbury Justice Centre is situated and also the language from where they were from. Thus through the work of Aunty Zeta Thomson and Aunty Fay Stewart-Muir, who travelled to the prison each week, there was continuous connection to Elders and through them a connection to their language and culture. Appropriately, the Yarning Circle was the pedagogical technique employed in the program. Aunty Zeta is also a panelist for, ‘Tarwirri’, the Indigenous Law Students and lawyers Association of Victoria (ILSLAV)

Aunty Zeta has a keen interest in enhancing children’s connection with Culture and Language. The Yarn Strong Sista series on CD are stories for children read by her. She is also involved with the Koorie Tiddas Youth Choir, which has come together as the result of collaboration between the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Songlines Aboriginal Music Corporation. The boys in the choir are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and the initiative supports choir members to deepen their sense of identity and connection to Aboriginal culture and local community through music and performance. Aunty Zeta continues to work with young people by conducting Culture classes at Worawa Aboriginal College.

2.1.1.3 Aunty Fay Carter

Aunty Fay Carter is a Djadjawurrung, Yorta Yorta Elder who was reared on Yorta Yorta Country in a fringe dwelling. Her ancestors were activists, who worked for human, political and land rights. She is an Aboriginal Elder who has actively contributed to both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Aunty Fay has been a supporter of Worawa Aboriginal College since its establishment by Hyllus Maris in 1983. She has served on the College Board of Directors and is currently a member of the Council of Elders. She attends and contributes to key cultural functions and events of the College.

Aunty Fay says:

Worawa looks beautiful. The visual hits you straight away and makes you aware that this is a cultural place.

She praises Aunty Lois for caring for the environment, which sets a great example. Aunty Fay recalls being called “a dirty black”. She says this has made her, and so many other Aboriginal people, have a real focus on “clean”. Aunty Fay is convinced that:

The Worawa culture and the Worawa people provide a model for pride in place and self.

Aunty Fay reflects on the importance of culture for all Aboriginal people and the importance of nurturing and celebrating Culture at Worawa Aboriginal College. She believes that culture frames the development of children and that Worawa provides a cultural frame that enables the students to develop an understanding and appreciation of their traditional Aboriginal culture and relate this meaningfully to
mainstream studies. For many students who come to Worawa unaware of their culture, Worawa has a responsibility to:

*do a culture backfill.*

To both learn mainstream subjects and either learn about or at least be re-educated in their Aboriginal culture, is a challenge for the Worawa students and the whole Worawa community. Aunty Fay believes that the girls who come from remote communities are a valuable resource to be acknowledged and used to meet this challenge. She also believes the importance of all students learning about the history of South East Australia. For many Aboriginal people, trying to survive takes over from learning the ways of their people. The Yorta Yorta people had to learn to survive post the walk-off from Cummeragunja. What made them such strong and successful people were people such as William Cooper, Uncle Doug and Aunty Gerry. These stories and lessons are important for the girls to learn, as they will be the women of the future. Aunty Fay cites the fact that respect for Elders has broken down, as an issue in Aboriginal Australia. She also emphasises the fact that it is the women who are maintaining culture and community.

Aunty Fay went to school with Hyllus Maris and knew her very well. She is an admirer of Hyllus and said she was:

*Always the “protector” of Aboriginal students at school – in a good way, verbal, not physical.*

As a young, girl Hyllus was a protector, thinker and problem solver and she was also like this as an adult. Hyllus was a conciliator from the beginning.
She was always able to have a foot in both worlds in which she could walk equally and with respect.

Aunty Fay commends Aunty Lois for continually reminding all members of the Worawa community and their associates, of the beginning of the College and the vision of Hyllus Maris that underpins all that occurs there. She understands the College Board of Directors and the Council of Elders as assisting in maintaining the vision and lauds the practice of alluding to happenings in the past in the context of the present, insisting that this practice continues in perpetuity. Aboriginal people are crucial in maintaining the principles upon which the College is based. Aunty Fay sees value in the re-establishment of the group designated “Friends of Worawa”. This was a group constituted to provide friendly advice and engage in fund-raising activities.

Aunty Fay listed a number of challenges for the future of Worawa Aboriginal College. These include:

- **Funds:** It has always been difficult to raise enough funds for College improvements and activities. She advises reflection on how the College can improve this situation.
- **NAPLAN:** These tests are culturally biased and so there is a need to work to change them or provide an alternative.
- **Succession planning:** It will be difficult to replace Aunty Lois. Aunty Fay outlined the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES) model where a deputy Chief Executive Officer was appointed and trained ready for when she was needed.
- **Provision of a stronger role for the Council of Elders:** This group could meet more often and through stories and yarning tell of the differences between past culture and modern culture. This would be good for both the girls and the Elders.

2.1.1.4 Aunty Diane Singh

Aunty Diane is a Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba, Taungurong woman. She was born in Echuca, Victoria and by Grade 5 had attended twenty-three primary schools. Later Aunty Mollie Burns/ Dyer, nee Tucker, who started the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Association (VACCA), fostered Aunty Diane. After attending Broadmeadows High School she entered the workforce and was employed at a trucking company and at the Aboriginal Girls’ Hostel. Aunty Diane then moved to the Mount Royal Nursing Home where the Matron asked her to train as a Nurses Aid. Here, she decided to upgrade her qualifications and applied to do Nursing training. Recognising that she had not studied intensively previously, she decided to upgrade her skills by undertaking a Monash University Orientation Course, available to Aboriginal people either returning to or entering study. Following this course, she enrolled in an Arts Degree at Monash, studying history, Aboriginal studies and anthropology. Subsequently, she held positions with the Department of Education and was the Koori Education Officer at Ballarat University. After a time, she returned to Melbourne to undertake a Diploma in Welfare Studies. Aunty Diane is now the Elder in Residence at Monash University.
Education is very important to Aunty Diane and all her family. With her husband she ensured that their three daughters all had the opportunity to participate in educational endeavours, which have enabled them all to lead very successful careers within mainstream culture, as well as holding leadership positions and contributing to Aboriginal Australia. Aunty Diane is adamant that Aboriginal students need to develop the capacity to be “two-way” learners. They need to learn from family and community Elders and use this learning to help them learn within mainstream (Western/Scientific) culture.

When asked how important is culture in a child’s education she responded:

The need varies with individual students. Many Worawa students come from communities where culture is very strong. These students need to learn from each other, about other cultures. This learning teaches the girls to appreciate their own culture as they develop an understanding about other cultures.

Aunty Diane says:

When young people are immersed in culture they do not always learn to appreciate how important culture is. The Worawa experience helps to develop this understanding.

She explains further that girls who come from communities in the South East of Australia have not always been exposed to Aboriginal culture. These communities have suffered and lost much of their culture. These students come from families and communities, which have been fractured due to invasion and The Stolen Generations. She values Worawa’s ability to provide activities and experiences that help the girls to understand their history and themselves, as young Aboriginal women:

Young people live in “the today” and they do not necessarily think about culture but at Worawa they experience it and when they look back, when
they mature, they will have learnt.

Aunty Diane says the College enables all students to learn from each other:

_The College is well situated for this, as the students come from all over Australia and they bring a lot of knowledge with them._

She says students from south Australian communities can learn from and with the traditional communities from the North. The opening of records, which are now available for study, can assist this learning.

Aunty Diane understands the location of Worawa is instrumental in providing an appropriate cultural context. So many Victorian Aboriginal people resided at Coranderrk, people from all the different mobs. Thus Worawa is on important Aboriginal land and it is Aboriginal owned and governed. The Executive Director of the College being Aboriginal and culture being taught by Elders further enhances the cultural context.

When asked what challenges students in learning about or celebrating their culture, Aunty Diane cites the fact that they come from many different cultures; thus a strength is also a challenge. The challenge is met by the Worawa culture program, which helps students to recognise both the differences and similarities between their cultures. For Aunty Diane, respecting other cultures and peoples and developing relationships across and between cultures is very important. She says:

_From the time when children are very young they are learning family and community values. Worawa expects that the students will live by those values at school. Here, family values are reinforced and complemented._

She also says that:

_Many Worawa students come from families and communities which are dealing with critical issues. These issues are responded to through a lens of Aboriginal values._

Aunty Diane also sees the partnerships with other schools and organisations as very important to Worawa. These partnerships enable the College to share and receive two-way learning, in the context of respectful relationships.

Proving to mainstream society that the Worawa model does work is also a challenge, particularly as:

_people, both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal, are often looking for failure._

She understands very well that Worawa needs the help of non-Aboriginal people, if it is going to succeed, particularly the professional expertise from teachers and wellbeing workers. The College also needs financial support from non-Aboriginal people and organisations, as many members of the Aboriginal community are not in a financial position to provide the necessary support. Aunty Diane says:
Aboriginal leaders in the College must know how to work with non-Aboriginal people, without losing control of the purpose of the College.

And be able to: 

balance what is required for the students and College with community expectations.

She elaborates further, saying:

We all come from different experiences. It is the sharing of these experiences and listening and learning from and with each other that will provide the way forward.

Aunty Diane understands that Worawa is continuing the dream of Hyllus Maris because:

Aunty Lois, as Executive Director, constantly reinforces the dream and vision of Hyllus Maris. She works to ensure that the students receive a quality mainstream education within an Aboriginal cultural context.

and concludes:

The responsibility to maintain the vision of Hyllus Maris lies with both the leader and the Board. It is important that Worawa ensures ongoing “walking together”

2.1.2 The College Board of Directors: Importance of Culture at Worawa

2.1.2.1 Chairman: Mark Thomson

Mark Thomson is a Yorta Yorta Wurundjeri Irish Scottish man. Mark attended Worawa College and was College Captain in 1997 and 1998. He has been on the Board of Directors of the College since 2009 and was appointed Chairperson in 2014. Mark says:

My knowledge of the history of the College, through family connections, and being a past student who had many positive experiences at Worawa, enable me to understand the importance of culture, relationships, western learning and stable leadership. I was instrumental in the revitalisation of Worawa as a girls College. I provide foresight and insight and a youthful exuberance. I believe that other Board members respect my commitment to Worawa Aboriginal College.

Speaking about culture from personal experience, Mark says:

I can say that culture is the most important thing. Culture provides a sense of self, wellbeing and confidence which leads to a person being comfortable
in themselves, particularly when confronting challenges. When you feel good about yourself you can do anything.

Mark understands that students may feel uncomfortable about their lack of knowledge/understanding of their own culture. If so, they will question their identity. He stresses that they need to understand there is no benchmark for Aboriginality. Even though they may feel there are levels of Aboriginality, at Worawa Aboriginal College they learn that is not so. At the College they learn about culture through learning language, culture and history. Marks says:

*Worawa Aboriginal College celebrates culture well.*

It is important to recognise programs such as the Pathways to Womanhood Program and the place/role of the Boarding Houses in making the girls feel comfortable and learning for life. There are also significant induction processes for both students and staff in the Worawa Way and the various routines of school life.

Mark values the continuation of the dream of Hyllus Maris to develop a holistic approach to two-way learning, as he acknowledges the contemporary relevance of learning in two worlds. He articulates the ability to accomplish this as the result of strong Elders and strong leadership, relevant community links, committed staff members and support from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, who believe in the vision of the College. Mark identifies long-term financial security as an ongoing issue as well as finding and retaining quality staff to maintain a quality team.

The setting of the College on historically important land facilitates the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual domains of a student’s development. This according to Mark enables a fundamental connection to land. The relationship between staff and students is tangible. He says:

*The feel of the College is so positive. The way Worawa makes students feel part of the College enabling them to grow and learn is so important. How they feel about Worawa, impacts on how they feel about themselves. The tone of Worawa illustrates a respectful culture.*

He also acknowledges the importance of the integration of wellbeing and the academic programs. Mark takes pride in the fact that all staff members recognise this and support students who are unwell or are experiencing difficulties in coping with trauma, such as that involving Sorry Business.

Through Mark, the Board of Directors praises the efforts of Janine, Kathryn and Kim in establishing and maintaining a connection to a student’s community, to ensure that they can make relevant links throughout the school year. The constant acknowledgement of the different communities means that each learns about and learns from each other. This leads to comfort for the students and a consequent readiness and willingness to learn. This Worawa approach links the traditional to the western scientific.

The importance of student groupings and personalised assistance in both curriculum and co-curriculum cannot be overstated. Mark reports that the Board of
Directors is pleased with the approach of Personalised Learning and the use of Digital Portfolios. Board members recognise that the members of the teaching team work closely together and share information about progress and appropriate strategies. Mark stated:

*I have faith in the competence of the Worawa teachers.*

The College also works to build an understanding of options and processes for future learning and assists girls to transfer out of the College to the next stage.

2.1.2.2 Members of the Board of Directors

Gary Thomas a former member of the Worawa College Board of Directors, now residing in Queensland, articulates the importance of culture in education in the broad sense:

*All education: its practice, process, reward and value is informed and affirmed by culture. It is not possible to speak of education without recognising the impacts of the culture in which the process is situated.*

Shannon Faulkhead a current member of the College Board of Directors, values culture in education because:

*Pride in one’s culture is vital to mental health and wellbeing. Indigenous people have been taught to be ashamed of their culture, or that their culture and people do not or never existed. Inclusion of culture in schools/education is so important to address this.*
Gary says, diversity of culture, both within the student body and the staff is a possible challenge to the College because all cultures must be respected. Gary also notes the possible emotional and intellectual effect on some students:

For some students it can be quite a dramatic emotional and intellectual shift to realise their culture is valued and that this is practised throughout their learning experience.

He understands challenges that emanate from bureaucratic education systems are significant as is the lack of understanding of the ‘Worawa Way’ by stakeholders, including some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Shannon adds another challenge:

Financial support. Worawa is a small independent school, and as such would need to seek funds for everything beyond the basics covered by government funding.

The dream of Hyllus Maris, expressed by Shannon is:

Hyllus Maris’ dream was where Indigenous culture is dominant throughout our children’s learning, whilst giving them the best education possible for the students to achieve their potential and personal goals. Worawa embodies this every day through its teaching and continual expansion and development of opportunities for students during their years at Worawa and beyond.

Shannon attributes the continuation of the dream to Aunty Lois’ strong leadership and vision. Gary notes that this experience of school is passed on to the children of the young women who attend Worawa.

Gary is no longer a member of the Board of Directors and therefore has no direct responsibility for the College. Shannon who is a current member describes her contribution in the following terms:

I bring my knowledge as an Indigenous person who didn’t know anything about her culture till a teenager. I have experience in community, government and academic organisations. I am passionate about Indigenous children, especially young women, learning in an environment where who they are, where they come from, and their culture is respected and incorporated/levered upon in their academic learning instead of being belittled, or denied.

Link to: Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Key Enabling Factor Two
Section 3: Literature Review: World View and Empowerment
2.1.3 *Culture: Parents and Grandparents*

Relationships with students' families and home communities are valued and are critical to students' wellbeing and learning. The College emphasises building and maintaining relationships with students’ families and home communities. The College holds an annual one day School, Community Forum where families workshop their aspirations for their girls with Worawa staff. The following day, parents / guardians participate in parent, student, teacher interviews and have consultations with the College Wellbeing Coordinator, and School Nurse.

While students at Worawa Aboriginal College were not personally part of the Stolen Generations, many experience transgenerational trauma. They, as do their families, continue to face the stress of living in racist environments; thus their development is as Bronfenbrenner (1993) says, a complex, reciprocal, interactive and evolving process.

Five parents and grandparents took part in a focus group interview in 2013, yarning with Mark Thomson. In 2014 Aunty Lois Peeler interviewed five parents and one grandparent. One of these parents was in the group interviewed in 2013. The following data was generated from these interviews.

https://vimeo.com/83886067  
https://vimeo.com/121959792  
https://vimeo.com/121959791

Parents and grandparents value the opportunity for their daughters and granddaughters to be educated in a two-way model. In focus group participation Judy, a grandparent, described such a model, using significant hand gestures:

*Aboriginal culture - European culture, compare and put them together.*

Natasha elaborated on the long-term cultural advantages of such a model for her daughter:

*If she grows up here in this environment, keeping two sides strong, she goes back and is respected by both sides – Indigenous and non Indigenous- respected culture-wise and in mainstream work-wise and*
by work colleagues. She can get respected in two worlds and that’s why I think Worawa is the best for her. They have the two-world mind and way of thinking.

and the advantages relevant to personal life in community:

There’s a lot of girls smoking and getting pregnant - too young - like all communities and I just wanted my daughter to grow up, to be a woman before she became a mother, instead of being a young mother, and I believe Worawa can do that for her; teach her to do the right things

In 2014 Natasha added, acknowledging the importance of her daughter's attitude in relation to her parental wishes:

At Worawa she has the best opportunity. At Worawa she can rotate with tradition and culture and she can be anything she wants. But she has to put her own heart to it. We can put her on the stepping-stones and guide her but she has to take the steps herself. We are proud of her.

Other parents interviewed in 2014 expressed the importance of being able to walk in both cultural worlds. Natasha says:

We want these girls to have leading positions in the community - positions that visiting people have at the moment.

And of her own daughter in particular:

We want her to get a good job and be someone not like the other girls back at home. We want her to be a role model.

Mildred, a grandparent of one of the students expressed pride in her granddaughter and her wish that she become a role model:

I am proud of my granddaughter for coming here to school, which is a long way from home and when she finish her schooling here, we need role models in our community, for other kids to see. If they see my granddaughter they might want to come and learn more because education is very important for us.

She adds:

We don't want our kids to be laughed at. We want them to learn more English.

Other parents interviewed at this time spoke of the effect of Worawa on their daughter’s understanding and appreciation of their Aboriginal culture. Sheryl says:

She’s more understanding of different cultures. She has met girls from so many communities. We are urban, we are in town, not in community. It is so different especially the languages. I say to her, “Please learn one of the languages and learn about the food and their respect for the land”.
She is learning but slowly, slowly.

Lorraine articulates the difficulty of conducting a school with such cultural diversity but values the breadth of opportunities this has given her daughter:

*She is able to be with her own people and experience different cultures. She got to see first-hand that there are Aboriginal people all over Australia; this land belongs to Aboriginal people. She got to meet and to be with a lot of Aboriginal people from different communities and urban settings.*

*She went to Hawaii this year and she met Indigenous people from over the other side of the world and talked to them and heard about their lands and what they want to do with their country and education. She would never have had these experiences if she stayed home. The school has been an eye opener.*

Lorraine is sure that:

*Being down here has made her more confident as a young Aboriginal woman.*

and that this extends beyond the time she spends at Worawa because:

*She comes home to me and wants to learn more. She is more passionate about her country; she’s more passionate about her culture.*

Jan whose granddaughter was largely unaware of her culture before attending Worawa says that:

*Worawa has provided that grounding and that space to learn who she is and to grow and have the connection back with her siblings. She didn’t know what she was missing till she came and heard what the other girls had and were able to offer her.*

Link to: Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Enabling Factors, 2.2 and Key Enabling Factor Two, pages 375-378
Section 3: Literature Review: World View and Empowerment Parent Voice
2.1.4 Staff Members Understanding of Culture

In this section Rani, Christine, Sally and Sinead share their insights into nurturing and celebrating culture at Worawa. They exhibit wide-ranging perspectives.

Rani was a house parent for two years and she now volunteers as a teacher aide. She has worked at Worawa Aboriginal College for five years but has worked with Aunty Lois Peeler over many years, including the time when they were both professional models. Rani describes herself as a link and connector and understands herself as a role model for the girls, both as an older woman and as a person who encourages the girls to learn.

For Rani:

*Respecting culture is a given; “the girls have culture innately, we develop that; there is something unsaid that supports the dancing and singing of cultural songs”.

She supports the girls in learning about their culture in the context of all learning at Worawa. When the girls display resistance or reticence she encourages them with enthusiasm, and tells them:

“learning is a wonderful thing” and “we are all in this together, going to class is what we do here.”

Rani acknowledges the breadth of culture in the College, ranging from girls who are culturally knowledgeable to those who have been denied the elements of their culture. For her, knowledge that they have the culture precedes nurturing and celebrating.

Lack of confidence in themselves is often a trait of the students and Rani identifies the need to delve through layers of developed self-protection techniques, in order to build confidence and self-esteem. She spoke of a girl whom she describes as “clingy”. This for her is a coping mechanism, required for survival in previous situations. The girl has been in numerous foster homes and so it is a challenge to develop a relationship that engenders trust. Being at Worawa means the students have the opportunity to:

* know who they are and where they come from and see what they might become.

The complexity of developing this understanding and the confidence that accompanies it is demonstrated in Rani’s description of another girl who was extremely apprehensive of making a lengthy train journey on her own. Rani and she went to the station and explored all they could. As well as acquainting the girl with ‘Travellers Aid’ and explaining its function, Rani pointed out other people who might be afraid, endeavouring to demonstrate that for all people ‘being scared’ is a part of growing up. The girl’s response was:

*Really? Then I don’t want to grow up.*
The girl successfully negotiated the train journey, having been introduced to a woman with young children, who was also travelling the route. Rani is convinced that this girl is now maturing very well as she is able to share her fears very openly.

_This is part of learning not to have fear of the world you live in, nor to have fear of what the future may bring._

She further comments that:

_Aboriginal women have a lot to learn about overcoming fear, especially fear they justifiably carry for their children_

Rani’s observation about learning in the cultural context of the classroom convinces her of the need for balance in any approach. She says teachers need to be flexible in order that the girls are not to pushed to anger, remembering that emotion under behaviour of anger is often an expression of fear or sadness but at the same time need to uphold the high standards they set. Girls acclimatise to the standards set for them if there is consistency and kindness on the part of the teacher. Rani also does not hesitate to tell the girls that teachers want the best for them and that they should therefore respond as expected.

The typical teenage wish of the girls is emphasised by Raelene when she says the most significant factor in assisting them to nurture and celebrate their culture is:

_The acceptance of their culture by others – when others accept then they do – they are teenagers._

Christine, The Wellbeing Coordinator, corroborates this understanding by saying:

_When the girls feel valued and respected and we hear their stories._

She notes that the girls delight in trying to teach staff members their language.

_They teach us language and laugh and laugh when we can’t pronounce the words correctly. They have skills we don’t have – plenty of them. They are proud to share what they have – maybe they don’t realise what they have till they come away from it._

These efforts not only demonstrate interest in language and therefore culture but also assist in the building of relationships between staff and students. Christine says all staff members are supportive of the girls developing pride in their culture and the team approach sends a very strong message.

Christine also observes that the students learn from each other and gradually they find they have much in common. When those who are strong in their culture hear stories about communities other than their own, especially where there has been suppression of culture, they value what they have. Those who have little knowledge say:
It is hard to learn about someone else’s culture when I haven’t got mine.

To compound this, many students have experienced racism and consequently have low self-esteem, so pride in culture may take a long time to emerge. This understanding highlights the need for a safe environment, in which learning, sharing and teaching of culture can occur. This in turn supports the sustainability of culture:

When we are gone it’s not about what we have learnt but more about what we have taught others.

The knowledge that communities of some girls have very strong links with Christianity is helpful. Familiarising ourselves with the particular Christian denominations of the communities and students means, that in addition to Cultural practices and obligations, Sorry Business may include the lighting of a candle, or saying a prayer. Some girls also like to go to church or go for a walk. Christine says:

They know what meets their needs – they are the experts.

Tapping into people in the community who are close to students is also important. Christine says:

If I ring because a girl is homesick and her mother says “Tell her to be strong,” I use those exact words, as she is used to them.

Sally, one of the teachers, visited many communities in 2013 and found this enabled her to understand the local expression of Aboriginal culture. She warns that Aboriginal Culture is often described as if it were an homogenous whole, and while there are many similarities across Australia there are many differences. She says:

The girls love to share and compare cultural stories and share language and they love watching movies of their culture. Dance gives them the opportunity to share and at the same time connect back to their community.

Sally also discusses the advent of American culture into Aboriginal culture especially in relation to Hip Hop. Thus cultural expression and sharing is in the context of contemporary culture. Relevant here is the contact zone (Sarra, 2011), the cultural interface (Nakarta, 2007), inter-subjectivity (Langton, 1993), the Aboriginal cultural matrix (Narogin, 1990) or the third space (Janz & Sumner, 2013). Aboriginal people, function in a position along a continuum defined at either end by an Aboriginal worldview and a western scientific worldview. While a continuum implies linear progression, movement between these two extremes is very rarely linear; the third space is described in a non-linear manner, within an infinity diagram (Janz & Sumner, ibid).

Sally is careful not to use labels such as ‘Indigenous’, ‘urban’, ‘female’ or ‘mainstream’ to the detriment of seeing the student first and foremost as a person. All staff members are very aware that they are supporting the development of strong women who are responsible for themselves. Reminiscing on personal experience in the light of this, Sally says that girls who come with little knowledge of their culture are discovering:
who am I, who am I in an Indigenous sense, who was my family and what have they been through? As a 14 year old I wasn’t faced with this, when I was trying to work out what sort of person I wanted to be and what sort of learner I wanted to be. A lot of these kids are faced with a lot here and we are very aware that they are working out their Indigenous identity as well as their personal identity.

Sinead, another teacher, notes the difference in Worawa:

In the Top End they don’t identify cultural practices because it is their culture. Here at Worawa there are many cultures and they are celebrated.

Sinead also notes the similarity with her own upbringing. She is Irish and says she was unaware of her culture before she came to Australia. She likens Aboriginal groups in Australia to nations in the European Union, as they are:

all different but trying to fit together.
2.1.4.1 Boarding House Staff

Interviews were conducted with Kim, Head of the Boarding Program, Lyn, a week day house parent for four years, Francina, a teacher, who has recently come from Singapore and also works weekdays and Sammy, an Indigenous woman from Tasmania, who works as a weekend house parent and has done so for eighteen months. They all value the opportunity to care for the girls and all expressed a desire to nurture the students.

Kim believes

*the greatest benefits in terms of culture come to the students who are urban or from regional centres, who haven’t had a strong identification with their culture. Instead of being ashamed of being Aboriginal, they become proud of the fact that they are Aboriginal.*

A two-way learning process enables reciprocal learning between the girls from urban and regional centres and the girls from remote communities. Worawa acknowledges that all students bring Aboriginal culture with them and that even though they have different languages and practices, they are all one people. Aunty Lois stresses this in student assemblies and they quickly learn as part of their education at Worawa, that respect is the due of everyone. Worawa through its values, provides an environment, which is expansive and respectful of ‘what it means to be Aboriginal’. Kim also cites art and dance as important avenues for learning about and celebrating culture and notes that all differences dissipate

*when the girls are on the basketball court, where they unite because they are Worawa girls.*

Within each house, culture is nurtured and celebrated. Lyn gathered old art works from the art room and displayed them throughout her house. She believes:

*My house is the only house that has an Aboriginal theme and the girls feel at home with this.*

Francina, a house parent is Singaporean. The girls have the opportunity to explain their culture to Francina who says:

*I am a very curious person, so when I sit with the girls at dinner I ask them a lot of questions because I want to know myself what it is like in community – what foods they like, how marriages take place and also sorry business. They are very anxious to tell me especially about the food they miss.*

Cultural exchange occurs when the older girls especially, express interest in the culture of Singapore. Francina says the girls also enjoy talking about her children and this gives her the opportunity to ask them about their siblings.

Sammy is a weekend house parent who is not attached to a particular house. She is therefore able to provide support either to the group as a whole or to
individuals as required. Sammy values her Indigenous culture very much, particularly as she has spent time and energy in coming to understand her culture more deeply as an adult; she understands the importance of walking in two worlds. She says:

_What’s refreshing about Worawa is that the culture is still alive and out there. We keep the culture alive by encouraging the girls’ Indigenous side as well as the western side._

Sammy values the unique opportunity to assist the girls to walk in two worlds as a weekend house parent. Talking to people in shopping centres and taking part in sporting events are important on the weekend.

_On the weekends you get to be with the girls and do a lot of activities. Saturdays are all about sporting competitions and we all go off on a Saturday morning with the girls; they are representing Indigenous people in the local community. Our netball team won the grand final recently and that was a fantastic thing to be a part of._

Her pride in the girls’ achievements extends to their sporting uniforms, which have student designs and artworks on them. Through this, culture is nurtured and celebrated. Sammy adds:

_It is great to have such a wonderful group of young people representing not only the College but the Indigenous community._

**Link to:** Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Enabling Factor, page 2.3  
Section 3: Literature Review: World View and Empowerment

### 2.1.5 **Students’ Focus on Culture**

Aunty Lois Peeler quotes Hyllus Maris’ recognition that Aboriginal young people were “growing up in a cultural vacuum” as an impetus for her relentless desire to open Worawa Aboriginal College.

Nine of the students attending in 2014 were interviewed for the project and recorded material from one student attending in 2013 was also used as data. The students from 2014 are: Andrea, Alliyanna, Hakira, Jaden, Jamira, Kahealea, Maxine, Regina and Sasha. Kira a student attending in 2013, was also interviewed. Zakima recorded a speech at the 2013 Presentation Day. Aunty Zeta Thomson teaches Culture classes at Worawa.

#### 2.1.5.1 **Students’ Thoughts**

For most of the girls interviewed, it was a family decision for them to come to Worawa, most often a decision resulting from adverse experiences in previous schooling. Jamira, who made her own decision to come to Worawa expresses her motive:
I wanted to focus more on my education and get a better understanding of who I am as an Indigenous girl.

Kira who also made her own decision says she thought:

*A school with young Aboriginal girls would be better.*

The girls interviewed recognised the importance of learning about their culture in classes from Aunty Zeta.

Kira says:

*Aboriginal culture is very important to us because it is the way we live and it is easier to talk to the other girls here because they know what it is like to be Aboriginal.*

Jamira knew little about her culture before coming to Worawa and says,

*Now I know who my people are and where I’m from and how strong and how meaningful it is to be proud of who I am as an Aboriginal. One of my tribes Bardi, is from One Arm Point, north of Broome in Western Australia. I was born in Darwin and raised in Melbourne with my white Dad.*

She is impressed by the fact that the girls from communities may speak three or four languages and that Worawa teaches all the girls to value their culture.

*Before I came here I didn’t know where I belonged and now I just feel real comfortable with who I am. I know how to deal with other people if they say where are you from, I know exactly what to say.*

Jaden also knew little about her culture prior to coming to Worawa. She says:

*I’ve learned a lot about culture. Schools I have been to didn’t focus on Culture, like Worawa does. I can now talk about where I’m from. I had an idea but didn’t know before; I now know my tribe and some language.*

The scant knowledge Jaden had came from her grandparents:

*Nana and Pop were part of the Stolen Generation. They were both stolen and taken to Groote Eylandt. When I was little my Nana and Pop told me stories about their life on the Island.*

Aunty Lois is understood to be a cultural role model by all the girls. Regina says that Aunty Lois tells all the girls:

*Be a proud Aboriginal woman and be proud where you come from.*

Jaden adds:
We all respect Aunty Lois because she is an Elder. All my Nana’s cousins are Elders.

Jamira describes the motivation she receives from Aunty Lois:

She always motivates me every assembly. I always have big think when I listen to her. And then I reflect and then I try to make the right decisions and have pride in who I am and think about what it takes to have respect in others and yourself.

Kahealea, with a great deal of emotion, describes the turning point in her conscious decision to change her behaviour:

Aunty Lois took me into her office one day and said “If you go down this path” (that I was going down) “nothing along the way will be good for you. If you go down a different path I can guarantee you the best life”. And I changed.

Maxine attributes the difference between other schools she has attended and Worawa to Aunty Lois:

Worawa is better because Aunty Lois, the principal, is Aboriginal and that explains it a lot. You get to do culture things and stuff. You are allowed to do cultural artworks and stuff not like other schools.

The girls understand that the ceremonies and rituals that take place at the school, such as the Smoking Ceremony and the Acknowledgment each morning, as well as Painting and Dance classes are important avenues enabling them to learn about, live and celebrate their culture. They also mention events celebrated in the wider community including NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Day.

Andrea speaks of a moment when she exhibited pride in her culture:

I went on the radio once and helped talk about culture and let all my friends know how important it is to people and that you should never let your culture go for something else.

The girls who have a detailed knowledge and come from communities share their culture with others. Respect for culture is paramount: Jamira says,

I respect my own culture by respecting other people’s culture and that’s showing respect towards myself.

Not just respecting only your indigenous friends and peers but other people like white people – their cultures.

Sasha links respect with longevity of culture

Our culture was made a long, long time ago by our Elders. It’s like all
Sasha teaches her dances and language to other girls and her family is very happy she does this. Andrea enjoyed learning Sasha’s dance:

*I practiced and watched every move. I kinda got it straight away and when you dance it’s like there’s a free feeling. It makes me feel really good when I’m dancing with the girls.*

Andrea is from an urban community and shares part of her own story with fellow students:

*I tell them about my background and my ancestors and things my tribe’s achieved and stuff. In .......... there was a lot of racism and they and other tribes made a radio program and they talk about culture and stuff for Aboriginal people.*

2.1.6 *Whole School Celebration of Culture*  
(http://vimeo.com/85232876)

Presentation Day concludes the year at Worawa and is a celebration of culture. While culture is celebrated continually throughout the year in all facets of College life, Presentation Day celebrates culture in the context of achievement.

At Presentation Day in 2013, the compere, Tikiri Onus, a Yorta Yorta man, spoke of the 30th anniversary celebrations that had taken place that year. He commended Aboriginal author and Yorta Yorta woman, Hyllus Maris (1934-86), for her beautiful expression of connectedness with the land, in her poem ‘Spiritual Song
of the Aborigine’. Kira Williams-Brown recited the poem, which is part of the Worawa students’ weekly Assembly ritual:

I am a child of the Dreamtime People  
Part of this Land, like the gnarled gum tree  
I am the river, softly singing  
Chanting our songs on my way to the sea  
My spirit is the dust-devils  
Mirages, that dance on the plain  
I'm the snow, the wind and the falling rain  
I'm part of the rocks and the red desert earth  
Red as the blood that flows in my veins  
I am eagle, crow and snake that glides  
Thorough the rain-forest that clings to the mountainside  
I awakened here when the earth was new  
There was emu, wombat, kangaroo  
No other man of a different hue  
I am this land  
And this land is me  
I am Australia.

Every school day begins with Aboriginal protocols and all College events commence with a smoking ceremony, honouring the Spirit Ancestor Bunjil and recognition of the Traditional Owners.

Aunty Lois Peeler spoke to the assembled audience and described the vision of Hyllus Maris for the development of a school where Aboriginal students could
receive a holistic education in a two-way cultural context. Aunty Lois reiterated Hyllus Maris’ wish when she recalled her words that:

> the Worawa curriculum should be based on the best elements of both traditional Aboriginal and current Australian education, aiming to produce an Aboriginal person versed in his/her traditions and proud of his/her identity, who has the tools and necessary qualifications to contribute effectively to the Australian community.

Aunty Lois continued, outlining the cultural, well-being and academic programs that contribute to this goal. Following this, a group of girls sang ‘Ngarra Burra Ferra’, a song that enabled the Yorta Yorta Elders to keep their language alive. Aunty Lois joined them in singing the song.

A parent, Natasha Pozzano, from Galiwinku spoke about her daughter, who since coming to Worawa has learned respect for her great grandfather. She expressed the gratitude of all the parents by presenting a card to Aunty Lois on their behalf.

**Link to:** Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Enabling Factors, 2.2 & 2.4
Section 3: Literature Review: World View and Empowerment

### 2.2 The Worawa Way

The College Brochure describes the Worawa Way as:

> An Aboriginal learning model grounded in Aboriginal values and ways of knowing, doing and being.

It further describes ways of knowing, doing and being:

- **Ways of being:** Relationship, referring to collaborative and holistic learning.
- **Ways of valuing:** Respect, connecting learning to country, community, culture and Narrative.
- **Ways of knowing:** Responsibility, fostering creative, independent learning by Observation.
- **Ways of doing:** Rigour, creative, adaptive, hands-on methods of learning including problem-based, and scaffolding for mastery of skills.

The brochure continues:

> The essential feature of Aboriginal pedagogy is learning connected to country, community and culture. Aboriginal pedagogies are ecological and place-based, drawn from the living landscape and from profound ancestral and personal relationships with place. Community links provide an essential way of learning, as group-oriented, localised and connected to real-life purposes and contexts (Yunkaporta 2012).
Below is a visual depiction of the connection between the ‘Worawa Way’, Aboriginal values and Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, valuing and doing. For Worawa, Aboriginal land, history and experiences of the ancestors is a starting point. Four Aboriginal core values of Relationship, Responsibility and Respect, with the addition of Rigour in learning are basic to this pedagogy. Alliyanna, a student from a remote community, reflects this when she says:

*Before I came to Worawa I knew responsibility, respect and relationship but I didn’t learn rigour.*

Figure 5.1: *The Worawa Way* (Peeler & Yunkaporta, 2012).
The values of Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour are an integral part of the fabric of life at Worawa Aboriginal College. These values constitute the ‘Worawa Way’. Kim’s explanation of the importance of these values at the Community Forum has already been recorded in a previous section.

2.2.1 *Staff Members’ Understanding of the Importance of The Worawa Way*

All the teachers in their interviews made continual reference to the ‘4R’s’. It is evident to those conducting the interviews that these values are an integral part of their thinking, acting and reflecting. Kathryn and Jeanene offer selected examples.

Kathryn understands safety and security provide the basis for the development of respectful relationships. She says the Worawa Way provides a strong value base and enables strong organisational structures. The values of Relationship, Respect, Responsibility and Rigour and strong organisational structures are evident in both the houses and the classrooms. The Positive Behaviour Management Plan is also based on the values. Constant reference to the values throughout the day makes a difference.

Kathryn cites the example of a 14 year old girl who:

*acts like 26 and when she arrived couldn’t relate to kids – couldn’t make small talk – couldn’t make friends – only made virtual friends on the internet.*

Other exhibited traits were her lack of engagement in class and inappropriate language. She had largely been a school refuser in her rural context, before she came to Worawa. Art was her strength and she spent most of the time drawing in class and it was evident she was very intelligent. The staff members persisted and the girl changed her behaviour.

This particular girl joined the drama class and the choir and started to make friends. Recently Kathryn and some other staff members overheard a conversation between the girl and another student who had been in State care. They were discussing the word “kindness” from the Resiliency program in the context of Relationship, Respect, Responsibility and Rigour, with a view to relating it to one particular value. They discussed this for about half an hour. Previously the word kindness, relationship, respect, responsibility and rigour were most probably not in their vocabulary. After a term, this girl is proud of her culture and her mother cannot thank the staff at Worawa enough, for her daughter’s modified behaviour. Kathryn concludes:

*We know what we do works; we know we can make a difference*

She is sad for those whose behaviour cannot be sufficiently modified in the short term because some girls have to leave prematurely:
Some girls when their behaviour is so bad that they endanger other students have to leave.

Jeanene values the ‘4R’s’ and is constantly amazed at the insistence of the girls on the benefits of these values. She has heard a girl saying:

*I am following the ‘4R’s and I’m getting better. The girls tell those who are new: “Hey you need to do this because it will be better for you”. It is really powerful.*

Through stories from peers outlining the benefit of the values of the Worawa Way, students have inspired others to make a choice, a choice for the better. Jeanene comments about one girl:

*She is articulate and has gone through a journey in life. For a 16 year old girl to be able to articulate her experience and what she needed to do to get to where she is and the benefit of that, is amazing - most 30 year olds can’t do that.*

She values the continual focus on Rigour:

*This is the hardest for the girls to learn, that they need to keep going when the going gets tough. They see when stuff happens and you keep going and that develops the idea they can do it.*

2.2.2 A Student’s Perspective

Sasha, a student was asked to write her understanding of the four values expressed in The Worawa Way. Her writing is recorded here.

Relationship:

*“Don’t hurt people’s feelings; it makes their feelings upset. Good relationship is like a best friend, who supports people and shows them love. Relationship is sometimes hard but all we can do is just be friendly to show our best relationship. Being loving and true will show us our true relationship”*

Respect:

*“Respect means that I have to sometimes leave people’s feelings, because even if it does not mean anything to me it could mean everything to them. The other thing about respect is to give it to get it. Don’t hate people’s personality just accept it, because that’s how it goes - respect.”*
Responsibility

“Responsibility is when you follow the rules of the boarding school like cleaning the room, going to school, respecting one another and accepting them. That’s what it means, follow the rules and accept our house parents and respect them. This is all the students have to do”.

Rigour

“Rigour means we have to keep trying our best, never giving up because it’s our goal. We will be keeping it going until we win. Rigour is the word that never gives up on you and never fails for the people that believe in true things.

Further data related to staff and student understanding of the ‘Worawa Way’ is contained in the remainder of this Section.

Link to: Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Key Enabling Factor One
Section 3: Literature Review: World View and Empowerment

3. Connected and Empowered Through Respectful, Responsible Relationships

Aboriginal families and communities select Worawa for the education of their young women, because they know the College provides a holistic program within a respectful learning environment, founded in quality relationships.
(Worawa College home page)

3.1 Building Respectful, Responsible Relationship with the Physical Environment

Worawa home page describes the physical setting:

Worawa is located on culturally and historically significant land of great natural beauty. The 136 acre (65 hectare) College is an Aboriginal community initiative and Aboriginal space, located on the Yarra River in outer eastern Melbourne. Access to the river and natural bush land provides an ideal environment for the teaching of cultural knowledge to Worawa students by Elders.

The site was previously a traditional camping site that became a government-controlled mission, Coranderrk, in 1863 until its closure in 1924. The Coranderrk/Healesville area remains rich in historical significance for Victorian Aboriginal people (Broome 2005: 119-126; Peeler 2011). Of the original 4000-acre station, only a half-acre cemetery was given back to the Kulin people.
Aunty Lois Peeler AM describes further significance of the site:

*The Leaders of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station rest in the cemetery at the end of Barak Lane (near Worawa) and there is a strong spiritual attachment that guides us in our thinking and existence ..........
*The cultural landscape of Worawa provides a central focus for Aboriginal knowledge, cultural practice and protocol for both the Worawa community and visitors.*

It is therefore appropriate that the Council of Elders meets at Worawa and that the Aboriginal flag is proudly flown.

The students learn about the historical significance of the site and as demonstrated in a previous section, value this learning. Through this learning and the experience of living here, a connection is established.

To obviate a poignant reminder of mission days, there are no school bells to signal the start or end of classes but contemporary songs with Aboriginal themes. Students recite the College anthem, the ‘Spiritual Song of the Aborigine’, composed by the College founder Hyllus Maris, at school assemblies and at College cultural events.

3.1.1 Dreaming Trail

The College totem is the Great Eagle Hawk Bunjil, the ancestor spirit among the Kulin nation in central Victoria. In the traditional creation story Bunjil created the environment and all the plants and animals that live in it, including humans. He taught the people how to survive in their country, how to make the weapons and tools they used, and gave them their laws. Bunjil represents strength and the ability to soar
above the earth within the sky world and the ancestral totemic figures, in the southern night sky. Bunjil is readily visible to visitors as they approach the Dreaming Trail.

The Dreaming Trail is a major focus of the College and is a space for cultural ceremony and traditional activities that link with cultural awareness programs, school activities and inter-school educational, cultural and sports events. On the Dreaming Trail students and visitors experience a smoking ceremony, discover the history of Coranderrk, hear stories from Aboriginal Elders and learn about Aboriginal people’s relationship with the land and the history of the Aboriginal tribes and clans connected to this important site.

The Dreaming Trail and the extensive grounds of the College does as Siegel, (1999) recommends; they “provide a landscape setting which creates a ‘Sense of Place’, enhances the natural environment and instils a lifelong regard for nature” (p. 2).

3.1.2 The Grounds

The extensive grounds set among rolling hills are demonstrative of Australian beauty. Trees are plentiful and contribute to the calm nature of the setting. An observer on entering the property is able to sense the spiritual dimension of this place. Many visitors have expressed this to Aunty Lois. The cultural landscape is marked by the peaks of mountains important to the Woiwurrung: Tonne-be-wong, Toole-be-wong and Donne-be-wong. Memorial Poles, strategically placed on the property, are significant in that they represent the thirty-eight Victorian tribes and the family Clans of all who passed through Coranderrk. Sheryl, a parent of one of the students says her daughter:

loves the College because of the connection with the land. The totem poles and the art work displaying the stories and she is learning the stories.
As well as natural beauty, care has been taken to develop areas of the site to provide active and passive recreation areas. The basketball, netball courts and oval enable physical activity within the girls’ daily program and when hosting competitions. The girls’ enjoyment of and skill in sport is obvious to the casual observer, the close observer and the staff at Worawa. Students also understand sport to be an integral part of their time at school, as they play sport everyday and compete regularly in local competitions on the weekends. To all observers and by their own admission, they are connected and empowered when playing sport and are particularly proud of being part of the Worawa teams. The facilities at the College contribute significantly to this.

Gardens surround all buildings. They include plants and rocks and provide a pleasant, colourful, multi-textured vista. The boarding houses engender a home-like atmosphere, as the houses, while forming a unit, are well-spaced. From the grassed area in the centre of the boarding houses a distant view is possible. This setting enables staff and students to engage in a relaxed manner and contributes to the girls’ ability to feel ‘at home’. Murals on the outside walls of buildings are colourful and the cultural themes help provide an appropriate, familiar setting for the students and interest for visitors. Some cultural icons are carved on tree trunks, adding to the interesting, informative display. There is a space with tables and chairs for passive recreation and also a space with swings. The swings are built to allow two people to sit side by side, enabling quiet conversation. These are set in a pit of sand; often the girls are observed using the sand in different ways as they speak with each other. ‘The Worawa Way’, a pamphlet outlining programs available for student wellbeing (Appendix 2), notes:

*The rocking motion of the swings is known to provide calmness, contemplation and to be an effective self-soothing technique. The swings are a useful place to talk to students about sensitive issues with the relaxing nature of the swings creating an environment for calm conversation. Students are often seen on the swings on their own or in groups as the space and activity support flexibility in this regard.*
The grounds men, Henry and Fergil, take pride in their care for the property and their work is significant in maintaining and further developing the external vista. Grounds are planted according to a landscape design created by Robert Boyle, Landscape Architect, which draws on the cultural and natural beauty of the landscape. Aunty Lois says that it is important to create an environment that enables the students to build a relationship with the land on which the school is situated, to know the history of the Land and the Aboriginal Family clans who walked the Land in the days gone by. Aunty Lois says, “Their spirit is in the land”. With this relationship comes the responsibility to care for the space, thus demonstrating respect and through this Worawa becomes “their country” whilst they are in the Land of Kulin. It is widely acknowledged by the College community and other visitors that Worawa is “the most beautiful school” in Victoria. Staff members from other schools regularly comment on this.

3.1.3 Boarding Facilities
The boarding section of the College consists of five residential areas. There are four houses, each in the charge of designated house parents, one parent being present during the week and another on weekends. The fifth residential area is a section of another house, where girls who are preparing to transition to other schools or employment, spend time. Sixteen students live in each of the main houses; two students share a bedroom. Girls from different communities occupy each house as only three or four students from the one community are allowed to live in the same house.

Each house has a different décor, reflecting the personality of the house parent. They are attractively furnished. Posters displaying the Worawa values: Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour are a constant reminder for the girls. There are communal areas in each house, as well as a ‘quiet room’, where the girls may simply sit quietly, read or play a quiet game. These are sensory rooms, with soft furnishings, soft lighting and an oil diffuser. Meals are served for all students in the main dining room of the recreation building. In this building there are facilities for indoor recreation. Overall, the boarding houses provide an atmosphere that assists the girls to develop a sense of belonging and to develop “within a web of social relationships” (National Curriculum Framework, India, 2005, p. 78). Kim says that students are proud of the boarding facilities and when showing visitors over the College, invite them to come and see “my house”.

Lorraine, a parent expresses the typical reaction to the boarding facilities when she says:

The accommodation is fantastic. I walk into those places and say “Wow, you should see the living conditions those girls live in – it’s fantastic”!

Lorraine extends this praise to the environment created at Worawa:

She is living in a culturally safe environment. There’s nothing I need to
worry about here because I know she is safe and she’s doing the activities she loves doing. She very rarely rings me but when she does she says she loves being down here.

3.1.4 Learning Spaces

Research also recommends that school structures should be flexible, smaller rather than larger, and student-centred, in order that the fundamental goal of middle years, effective Learning and Teaching, may be achieved (Department of Education, Employment and Training in Victoria & the Centre for Applied Educational Research at Melbourne University, 2000; Hill & Russell, 1999; Russell, MacKay & Jane, 2001; 2003; Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1993).

There are three blocks of classrooms. These are spaced well apart, so there is no sense of overcrowding. Some of the areas are older but these are furnished appropriately and have natural lighting. They are arranged to maximise learning opportunities. All have a bank of computers or iPads for student use. Posters displaying the Worawa values: Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour are in all rooms providing a constant reminder for the girls. The newer block of classrooms has contemporary furniture, including tables and chairs and couches. An outdoor learning space, visible from the adjacent classroom, enables flexible groupings.
Colourful posters are on the walls in all rooms, as well as a map of language groups of Australia. The Creative Arts Centre contains the Visual Art room and the Performing Arts room, a space that doubles as a communal area for various activities, assemblies and functions. The teachers are all aware of the importance of the physical nature of each learning space and the effect it has on their students. The Aboriginal values of relationship, responsibility and respect extends to the students’ responsibility in caring for their particular learning centre and treating it with respect. Sally, reflecting the importance of student ownership of the learning space in relation to her new classroom, comments:

*It is their space.*

Thus power in this learning space reflects an ecological understanding and so facilitates “the self confidence and self-esteem of learners of all ages” (The National Curriculum Framework, India, (2005, p. 82) and leads them to participate, which is one of the three categories eliciting resilience (Bernard, 1991; 1997; Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993; Henderson, 2013) and is also “a means of empowering the weak and the marginalised” (The National Curriculum Framework, India, (2005, p. 84).
The physical environment also affects the work habits of teachers as they work more effectively and efficiently in an inviting space (Siegel, 1999). This study also found that the arrangement of the working space had a direct effect on the social and professional relationships of teachers. Observers at Worawa noted the positive effect of open, light and colourful work spaces on both students and teachers, and that the arrangement of the teachers desks in the staff room enable private and collaborative learning.

There is also a group of three buildings, explicitly designed for certificate courses. One is a large space for Polytechnic, two others are for Hydroponics, one of which is climate-controlled and another space for Hairdressing. There is also a large storage shed for sporting equipment, including bicycles, canoes and a trailer.

The College is one of two unique Aboriginal locations for the international UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Cultural Village Program, selected because of its cultural and ecological attractions and high educational potential (UNESCO Observatory web site).

**Link to**: Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Enabling Factor 3.1
Section 3: Literature Review: The Physical Environment

### 3.2 Building Respectful, Responsible Relationships through Leadership

Leadership in a school environment involves the provision of inspiration, giving service and providing learning opportunities and experiences. Fundamental to this is the ability to create “an agreed sense of direction through a vision” (MacNeill, Cavanagh & Silcox, 2005, p. 6) and a commitment to the growth of people and community (Crippen, 2005). The goal is learners who are transformed into more fully human individuals (Duignan & Bezzina, 2004) enabled by learning that is authentic because it has personal meaning and appreciates the implications for the trajectory of a learner’s life (Zoller, Normore & Harrison, 2013).
The Leadership Team consists of the Executive Director and Principal, Aunty Lois Peeler, the Deputy Principal and Head of Learning and Teaching, Kathryn Gale, The Head of Boarding, Kim Walters and Andrew Jans the Business Manager. For the purposes of this project interviews were conducted with Aunty Lois Peeler, Kathryn Gale and Kim Walters.

3.2.1 Principal

Aunty Lois Peeler is the Executive Director and Principal of Worawa Aboriginal College. She is firm in her resolve to continue the dream of Hyllus Maris by leading a school, the aim of which is to develop young women proud of their Aboriginal identity who can contribute successfully in two worlds. This is the vision of the College and Aunty Lois works to create an agreed sense of direction through this vision. She stresses that Worawa is an Aboriginal initiative, Aboriginal owned and operated, developed from the experiences of Aboriginal people themselves:

\[
\text{it is an Aboriginal school, rather than a school for Aboriginal kids}
\]

Aunty Lois says there is difference and that difference is demonstrated fundamentally by \textit{The Worawa Way}.

The Worawa Way pedagogy model is based on the Aboriginal values of Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and the added value, Rigour. These values inform all aspects of College operations. Aboriginal spiritual beliefs in relationship to land and responsibility for Caring for Country and Place are expressed in campus care and development. Along with the core academic program, emphasis is placed on nurturing and celebrating Aboriginal culture as a crucial aspect of student self-esteem and wellbeing.
Aunty Lois is very aware of her responsibility as ‘caretaker’ in the continuation of the vision of Hyllus Maris of having an Aboriginal school. As a leader in the process, she has earned the right to lead in the manner described by Burney (2007: (http://www.reconciliation.org.au/governance/toolkit/4-1-indigenous-leadership)

Leadership in an Aboriginal cultural context is not given or measured by how much media you get or if you earn big money. True Aboriginal leadership does not come from high-level appointments or board membership. It doesn’t come from and cannot be given by white constructs. Leadership is earned; it is given when you have proven you can deal with responsibility and you understand that responsibility.

When speaking of the need for a macro view of Worawa, Aunty Lois says she has:

A helicopter view

which enables her to operate from a privileged position. This understanding is similar to the Adaptive Leadership ability to “look from the balcony” (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow 2009).

Assisting Aunty Lois to lead is her connection to and relationship with many Aboriginal communities. Her aim is to visit and come to know the communities of all the girls who attend the College. She achieves well in this goal, having established networks through previous senior positions in the Aboriginal community sector as well as in the government sector. Aunty Lois’ public career includes being the first Aboriginal model and first Aboriginal person to work in television; she worked on the GTV 9 Breakfast Session in the 1960s. She was part of the group that toured Vietnam at the height of the Vietnam War, that was the subject of the hit play and then internationally acclaimed movie The Sapphires. More recently, she has been co-author of the Yorta Yorta Language Heritage Program, author of the ‘Aboriginal Oral History of the Flats of Mooroopna, Shepparton’ and instrumental in the development of “The Flats” DVD. A dynamic contributor to Aboriginal Affairs, she is a recipient of numerous accolades including having received a Centenary Medal for her work in Indigenous Tourism and being made a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia for her "significant service to the Indigenous community as an educator, advocate and role model”.

These achievements equip her well to lead the Worawa approach “to strengthen the identity and self-esteem of young women as Indigenous Australians so that they are able to bridge both worlds and take their place as leaders within the Indigenous community and Australian society” (http://worawa.vic.edu.au/our-school/education/pathways/). This is two-way learning. While there is a designated member of staff who visits the communities of students before they come to Worawa, Aunty Lois believes that it is very important that she visits also.

Aunty Lois understands the dissemination of information to Aboriginal communities and the wider community to be a very significant aspect of her leadership role. She has a wide network across Australia and is constantly in
communication within this network. She is no stranger to modern technology and understands the Worawa Facebook page to be a very instrumental form of communication. Maintenance of this page is time-consuming but very rewarding as the various activities in which the Worawa community is involved come to life in a very appealing manner for a specific audience. Audience is always a consideration for Aunty Lois and she tailors communication accordingly. The Newsletter disseminated each term, gives accounts, using text and graphics, of the various academic and wellbeing programs for that period. Aunty Lois also conveys information about Worawa through many community forums, in addition to the annual event at the College itself. She also speaks at local, national and international conferences.

Building community at Worawa is another very important aspect of leadership and Aunty Lois says:

Worawa is an Aboriginal owned organisation. The Worawa Board of Directors has a commitment to 'Walking Together', bringing together Aboriginal knowledge, values and pedagogy and academic leadership, enriching the College program through shared wisdom and knowledge. The ‘Worawa Community’ encompasses all at Worawa. We are each there for a specific purpose and it is expected that every one of us contribute to that purpose.

Acknowledgement of the achievements by all people at Worawa is important to her. Worawa College is a learning community and so Aunty Lois understands that community is fostered through the common goal of implementing all the programs available to the students to the best of everyone’s ability. Assemblies provide a time for the distribution of praise for work well done.

In 2011, in order to engage all staff members in a collaborative process to discern future direction for the College, Aunty Lois commissioned an ‘Appreciative Inquiry Model’ workshop. The aim of the model was to increase an organisation’s capacity and vitality by encouraging all staff members to contribute ideas for the future of the organisation (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004). During the workshop the
staff participated in a series of activities resulting in ideas for the College. The ideas included the establishment of a mental health and wellbeing reference group, the development of a whole school framework for growth, emphasising respect and dignity, with a focus on strengths, Aboriginal culture and language underpinning all programs and the involvement of local and students’ communities. These ideas have been incorporated into practices at Worawa. As described in other segments of this Section, staff members are supported through a variety of relevant professional learning sessions, conducted by external presenters. Wellbeing staff members are also supported through professional supervision and secondary consultation opportunities.

Aunty Lois is adamant in her determination to select the best staff for the College. Prospective employees are informed of the special nature of Worawa and a rigorous interview process precedes their selection. She realises that people are engaged for a particular aspect of College life and some may find it difficult to maintain focus. If so, they may not be suited for the Worawa Way. While attracting and keeping quality staff is challenging, Aunty Lois sees the ability to select staff as a privilege. She explains that Aboriginal people did not always have access to quality education, because they were always subject to government policy. Worawa, as an independent school, is able to select its staff and Aunty Lois says simply:

*We want the best for our children and communities.*

Therefore, continuous improvement is her stated goal.

Aunty Lois realises the importance of a strong Leadership Team. Selection panels for College appointments consist of internal and external members. Apart from qualifications and experience, consideration of staff selection includes having worked in an Aboriginal community setting or demonstrated ability to communicate sensitively with Aboriginal people. Meetings of the Leadership Team are scheduled weekly. Here issues on the ‘pointy end’ of College operations are discussed, including enrolments, expenditure, campus development and Occupational Health and Safety. The Wellbeing team holds a separate weekly meeting, concerning student health and wellbeing and the residential and academic programs for the students are discussed. Aunty Lois acknowledges the difficulty of meeting the weekly schedule, because of time constraints imposed by other commitments. She also acknowledges the difficulty of some of the onerous tasks of leadership, for example having to say ‘no’ to a request, even though the request may seem very desirable and productive to the person asking. Knowledge to which she is privy but unable to divulge for many reasons, also proves challenging, when dealing with those who do not understand her position.

As well as implementing a holistic approach to education that addresses health, wellbeing, social and academic learning Aunty Lois has led or supported some very innovative approaches to life and learning at Worawa. She has established partnerships with other schools, in order to facilitate two-way learning locally and internationally. In developing local partnerships she is adamant that:

*Partnerships must be two way. The partnership must be beneficial to Worawa.*
Indigenous peoples the world over have commonalities in elements of culture and history. The international partnerships with First Nations schools, provides the opportunity to share our experiences and learn from each other. Aunty Lois supports the view that encouragement of the Arts is linked inextricably to culture:

*Reflecting an historical culture, art nurtures a sense of identity and self-concept, and helps to link people with others of a similar background. This is especially important to the Australian Aborigines who are currently striving to reclaim their cultural identity. From an emotional viewpoint art engenders hope, confidence and insight into the daily challenges of life. Rites of passage expressed through art provide an avenue for such things as “women’s business” to be translated in sensitive ways. And when words or language fail, art encourages the viewer to draw upon their inner resources.*

(Davis, et al., 2001, p. 3)

Aunty Lois has seen the implementation of Dance, Drama and Music into the College curriculum.

When former Chair of the Board of Directors, Bevan Mailman suggested that the building initially constructed for a sports centre be turned it into an art gallery, Aunty Lois supported his suggestion. The result was the establishment of a respected gallery on-site, where student work could be displayed and sold. Exhibition of student art developed and culminated in 2014 with an exhibition in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.
Aunty Lois has also led the introduction of major sporting and performing arts events at Worawa. Sporting events such as the annual Reconciliation Sports Carnival, open the College to partner schools, where young people enjoy cultural, social and sporting exchange in competition for perpetual trophies named in honour of Aboriginal leaders.

‘Pathways to Womanhood’ is an innovative program introduced by Aunty Lois. In this program the girls learn to care for themselves and to present socially. Speaking publically is part of the program as well as performing arts productions. Aunty Lois leads productions through her past experiences in public life and the co-opting of other competent staff members. Through her experience she is able to conceive a performance and then analyse its component parts. After analysis she then devises a rigorous process for completion.

The students’ data attests to their valuing Aunty Lois in her role as Aunty and principal. Her door is always open to them and they know she will treat them with respect. When asked how she works with individual students to build their self-esteem, Aunty Lois said:

_I talk to them in general from an Aboriginal perspective. As an Aboriginal woman I empathise with their lives and the struggles we, as Aboriginal people have. I always talk about pathways, and that as adolescents they are at a critical time of their lives. I want to support them in successfully stepping up and out into the next phase of their lives. Each girl is special and I want to support them to feel special, to look after themselves, make the right choices and not allow people into their lives who don’t respect them and who will steer them in the wrong direction. I remind them of the Aboriginal values of Relationship, Responsibility and Respect._

Aunty Lois agrees with respected Aboriginal author, historian and Aboriginal rights activist Jackie Huggins (2004), who states:

_It’s a very Aboriginal thing to do, to give younger people greater responsibilities within the community as they become able to take those responsibilities on. It is a culturally appropriate transfer of roles that involves respect in both directions – from the younger to the older and the older to the younger._

All the students interviewed noted Aunty Lois’ insistence on caring for country. She is strong in leading the girls to respect the Land on which the College is situated and to honour all those who walked the land of Corranderrk; their Story is in the Land. Reflecting on the past, nurturing and celebrating culture is always a focus at Worawa.

Speaking about succession planning for the College, Aunty Lois says:

_Succession planning is a necessity and is identified as such in the Board’s Strategic Plan. The search for the right person has been on for some time, it is not an easy task. We all know that we need to continue working to_
find the right person. A person who understands the unique nature of Worawa, who is committed to upholding the vision of the Founder, who appreciates the struggle of Aboriginal people to have an education model suited to the needs of our people and is considerate of the blood, sweat and tears that has gone into making the College what it is today.

It is evident that Aunty Lois takes her leadership responsibilities extremely seriously and will remain in her position till the right person is found and ready to assume leadership of the College.

3.2.2 Deputy Principal: Head of Learning and Teaching

Leadership for Kathryn begins with relationships. For her, relationships are fundamental in creating a sense of vision embraced by all; Kathryn notes this as an essential element of pedagogical leadership. She leads the academic staff at Worawa Aboriginal College and speaks at length about the building of relationships, trust and respect.

I once read that what builds a strong team, according to a very successful ex-principal, is the belief that “caring matters”. It is therefore true that through the relationships within our team, and in the meeting of our daily challenges together, we genuinely care and support each other in a collaborative and collegial way. We also extend this to care of our students and their families.

Kathryn also recognises the responsibility and importance of all in the team having growth mindsets, so:
we can grow and learn in our roles as teachers at Worawa. Working as we do, in a cross-cultural and trauma-informed learning context, we often question how we should act or react in ways that are culturally and emotionally sensitive, appropriate and wise.

She also says:

_We may not fully understand why a student is acting or reacting in a particular way. It is therefore accepted and encouraged that all staff seek assistance and advice from fellow staff and cultural leaders if required. This is done with no sense that they are not meeting expectations or ‘failing’, but it is welcomed._

Thus a growth mindset is established as we:

*share the responsibility and the load within our team, growing together in our learning, understanding, confidence and competence. Part of that learning and growth comes through the practice of reflection. As we do with our students, each teacher and each teaching team sets learning goals.*

Each teacher prepares their own personal learning goals, which are then supported by professional learning opportunities both inside and outside the College. Kathryn however, is a believer that it is the in-college professional learning and mentoring opportunities that have the biggest impact upon teachers’ on-going learning, within the context in which they work.

To augment this approach, small professional learning teams meet during a scheduled time each week to plan, reflect and review student learning in each of the Learning Centres. Some whole staff professional learning programs such as ‘Yarning Up on Trauma’ and ‘Calmer Classrooms’, offered by ‘Berry St’, ‘Stronger Smarter Institute’ on-line professional learning programs, and ‘Resiliency’ training by an outside provider, have empowered teaching staff in their Worawa teaching roles.

Such programs assist teachers to reflect upon:

*how we enact calm, productive and positive learning environments, whilst holding firm to the high expectations we have for each student’s learning potential.*

The staff meetings for Term 1 in any year are centred on the learning needs of the students. Learning goals students have set for themselves, and student base-line assessment data form the basis for team discussions. The focus is:

*How our teamwork helps students learn.*

Kathryn always provides further assistance to teachers as they work in their classrooms. One teacher described Kathryn as:

*Wonderful to work for; the support is always there.*
Overall she says that she wishes to build a team that understands its reason for being at the College is continual improvement:

> learning improvement for Aboriginal students at Worawa, and the understanding that these students have a future and we are part of that future and learning journey and we do that through looking at our improvement strategies.

Kathryn is a believer in positive learning struggles, as opposed to destructive struggles. She carries this belief into her support of teachers as they engage in productive struggles focusing upon the possibilities that lead them to an end-goal of finding solutions. She has therefore set up the structures through professional learning teams and mentoring pairs, for teachers to engage in productive struggles that lead to positive solutions. In addition, through the Worawa values of Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour, teachers and students alike are encouraged to support each other in striving for solutions, thus developing persistence and resilience.

Kathryn is firm in her belief that team and community is built among the staff by concentration on the strengths of individuals.

> Each staff member comes with strengths, ideas and something they can contribute to the team. It is important and productive to value this.

The strengths of the students are also at the forefront of her thinking and actions. She says that at Worawa:

> We value what the students bring. Many come with a richness of culture, language, dance and art. All students bring something of value when they come to Worawa and we concentrate on that, not on what they do not have.

Distributed leadership is also important and relevant, as the Worawa Model is based on Learning Centres and each coordinator is responsible for the management of their respective Learning Centres. Distributed leadership is also evident in Professional Learning Teams, as they:

> are trusted to work on their area. They have a leader and they report back to the larger group.

Thus in accord with Hooley (2009), Kathryn actively assists all, experienced leaders and inexperienced leaders, to play a relevant leadership role in the school community. Fink (2008) says that in doing this, control gives way to collaboration.

While Kathryn works effectively to establish and maintain community among the staff and to enhance their understanding of the principles of learning and teaching and their practice, she does not overlook basic needs when staff members are meeting:

> I will bring food; by nourishing somebody physically, they may then
see you can nourish them intellectually as well.

Identifying staff and students wellbeing needs is an important focus for Kathryn. When she recognises or is alerted to a level of anxiety exhibited in a student or teacher, she refers them to the wellbeing team for prompt assistance and also:

works underneath the anxiety and remains calm.

Relationship and connection are important elements in building community for students:

When you know particular students you then know how to approach them when they need assistance.

Kathryn has worked in communities and for many students she can make a connection somewhere. She says:

I love connecting through language and I know enough of a few languages to be able to understand and communicate in some. Because I have worked in community I know how to say the language, which is very important.

Kathryn also uses her knowledge of students’ potential to persuade them to concentrate on their learning. Conversations with students about these matters, if held in the presence of other teachers, assist these teachers to adopt the same positive approach.

Kathryn is convinced her passion assists her to lead effectively. She admits she is passionate about Aboriginal education and Aboriginal language education. Kathryn says:

these teachers know my passion which is authentic in this setting. I want them to understand the educational context these students come from and what we can add to that, to reach the goals and vision that we have for these students. A passionate teacher will always have the best potential for helping our students become independent learners and to reach their goals. Passion can help us achieve the vision that we have for our students.

It is significant to note here that all the academic staff members, in their interviews, describe themselves as a close team, that functions very efficiently and effectively. For all the academic staff this is contrary to their previous experience in other schools. They attribute the professionalism and collegial openness evident in staff relations to Kathryn.

3.2.2.1 School Organisation

Kathryn understands the need to create structures to organise the school day for both staff and students. She does this effectively. Staff members, who have been at Worawa for some time, noticed the change when Kathryn became Head of Learning
and Teaching. Steve describes Kathryn as “awesome” but admits he was initially confused by her efficiency.

*When she first started and we had all these rosters and rosters, I thought I would need a roster to figure out her roster – it turned out all right.*

Kathryn realises the importance of timetables (Appendices 3 & 4) and rosters for staff but also notes that students who have experienced trauma require routine and consequent certainty in their lives. This lessens their anxiety and the anxiety of all who come together to create a safe learning environment.

She established daily timetables and they are adhered to. They are colour-coded so all students and staff members know exactly where all should be at any given time. Staff rosters and meeting timetables were also established so that anxiety of staff and students was further minimised. These are empowering for all, including the Principal, as she knows where everyone should be and so is immediately able to address any anomaly with any student.

Kathryn leads by example. All describe her as, “making the difference”. Rani, a staff member, says:

*She doesn’t boss but leads by example.*

Kathryn’s own words attest to this:

*I am part of the team. I sit there in the staff room. I know what goes on and I put myself on the duty rosters just as other staff members are. I am not going to step back. Anything I expect them to do, I do.*

Obviously there will be times when she must be exempt from some duties, but her team accepts this, as it is more the exception than the rule.

Kathryn notes that at the beginning of her time on staff she was seen as the “expert from outside”, because of her previous employment situation. In her own words:

*The road was tough.*

All staff members and a significant number of observers have noted the change for the better through her leadership. Kathryn is content because she can say:

*I feel confident and I trust the staff. I am able to encourage visitors to go into any classroom, where they can talk to the staff about what they are doing and where they are taking these students.*

**Link to:** Section 6: Enabling Factor 4.3
Section 8: Appendices 3, 4, 17, 18 & 19
3.2.3 *Head of Boarding*

Kim, Head of Boarding, describes her leadership role at Worawa Aboriginal College:

*My role is to be the unbending brick wall, the boundary beyond which the students do not cross. Together with the residential team we create routines, activities, and an environment and boundaries that constitute what we consider to be best practice, based on what the students need rather than what they want. These are guided by the Worawa Ways of Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour.*

In essence, Kim understands her role is to bring to life the vision of the Board of Directors in relation to students’ behaviour and living environment. This involves directing staff to comply with policies even if they do not agree with these policies. Implementing policies can involve conflict with students and parents:

*but I continue to stand as a wall, unbending in the face of challenges.*

Care and respect for the girls is evident when Kim says the first important step for her is to learn the girls’ names, to take time to be around them, to learn:

*which are the girls who want you to be inquisitive and who are the girls with whom you need to sit and wait for their approach.*

She believes that she assists girls to build their self-esteem by showing that she knows each student, by acknowledging them through something as simple as a facial expression, by praising effort at assembly and by taking time to talk individually with students.

Kim understands that at Worawa, it is important to be open to physical demonstrations of affection but to also be aware of girls who want their personal space.

In relation to the parents Kim says:

*parents want one simple thing: to know that someone here knows their child, and is looking out for their child.*

Kim builds community with parents by providing reassurance of this through text messages and emails through the term. She also makes an introductory phone call for new students who do not come with a parent, giving them her number and explaining her role. Knowing that Kim lives at Worawa with the girls is reassuring to them, as they know she can be contacted after hours. Through knowing the girls and their parents she learns about their social connections in community and in Melbourne. This gives her more options to provide ongoing support and support in times of crisis.

In order to build community amongst the Boarding House staff members Kim acknowledges individual and collective effort, organises social monthly gatherings, a breakfast for weekday team and lunch for weekend team. In addition she organises a
dinner each term for all. Building community with the weekday team is challenging as the community to whom they have allegiance is in their own house and constitutes “their” girls. Kim says:

The weekend team are far more involved with “our” girls as they get to mix with different groups at sport and other activities.

In order to build authentic community Kim says it is important that:

I have a sense of humour, acknowledging my own errors so that mistakes are not punished.

In supporting the wellbeing of the Boarding House staff members Kim believes modelling good self-care is important. She also schedules regular peer support sessions and encourages all to “switch off” outside work hours. When necessary Kim also supports staff members in managing student behaviour, in order to ensure all house parents have adequate sleep.

As leader of the Residential Program Kim has implemented many changes during 2013 and 2014. She is confident that she and her team have transformed the boarding houses, to a more structured, yet caring environment in which the personal needs of students are catered for, whilst ensuring the consistency and the structure through maintenance of:

strict rules and inflexible routine,

thus ensuring

a place of safety, security and predictability.

Kim is adamant that this transformation has first and foremost improved student learning, as:

the sleep/bedtime routine produced an immediate positive impact in the classroom.

She notes that nutrition is a constant challenge that must be addressed by all staff. Through the wellbeing team and the daily residential handovers, introduced by Kim and supported by Kathryn, there is constant discussion and debate on possible methods of improvement.

In 2014, in acknowledgement for her work, the Executive Director, Aunty Lois, nominated Kim for the Boarding Schools Association of Australia, ‘Premier Leadership Award’, which she subsequently won.
These interviews with the members of the Leadership Team demonstrate their ability to create “an agreed sense of direction through a vision” (MacNeill, Cavanagh & Silcox, 2005, p. 6), commit to the growth of people and community (Crippen, 2005) and appreciate the implications for the trajectory of a learner’s life (Zoller, Normore & Harrison, 2013) in order to enable learners to be transformed into more fully human individuals (Duignan & Bezzina, 2004).

The interviews also demonstrate the commitment of the members of the Leadership Team to the principles that underpin the vision and operation of Worawa Aboriginal College. While their thoughts are philosophically aligned, they operate differently from each other in the field. Observers note that together, they have enhanced the operation of the College, the result of which is an educational facility, where the dream of Hyllus Maris to develop young women proud of their Aboriginal identity, who can contribute successfully in two worlds, is being realised. While all sectors of the Worawa College community and other significant stakeholders, acknowledge this, the focus of the team is always on continual improvement and they work tirelessly in this endeavour. Their difference, rather than being in any way problematic, is a significant strength.

3.2.4 Leadership for Learning

Leadership for learning is not a destination with fixed coordinates on a compass, but a journey with plenty of detours and even some dead ends (Fink, 2008, p. 32)

The teachers were asked to respond to three questions: In what ways do you demonstrate leadership at school? What are the most important traits of a good leader? What assists you to lead the students in your class?

In what ways do you demonstrate leadership at school? Responses to this question varied widely and included direct relationship with a designated Learning Area for example in the Mathematics/Science Professional Learning Team, through
deep knowledge in a specific area, for example in Aboriginal languages to taking responsibility for the operation of the school in the absence of the Deputy Principal.

What are the most important traits of a good leader? A range of traits was communicated including:

- leading by example; communication
- good communication; recognise the strengths of the team and enable them to use them. Lead by example by recognising your own strengths and weaknesses.
- listening, honesty, respect, encourage, follow through on your ideas.

One response provided an explicit link to the Worawa Way:

- Relationship, Respect, Responsibility, Rigour; patience, listening, knowing when to compromise and when to stand your ground, being willing to deal with the ‘hard’ issues, respecting those around you.

And another to a theory of Leadership:

- Integrity (core strength and authenticity); courage; understanding of the servant/ambassadorial nature of leadership.

What assists you to lead the students in your class? Responses included knowing students:

- knowing the students – the more you know the more you can work to develop their leadership skills. Mostly it is about working with them and leading/being “pushy” when necessary – but knowing when it is time to do which one.

Relationships:

- Good relationship with students (caring and positive)
- Strong relationships and mutual respect and leading by example
- Relationships with them through listening and spending time.

And sharing leadership in a democratic classroom (Hooley, 2009), with students:

- Share the leadership, give choices, treating the classroom as a democracy. Group discussions, ownership of choices.

3.2.4.1 Challenges

Good relationships with students are paramount in sharing leadership. At times relationships are tested through inappropriate behaviour of students. As members of a trauma-informed school, staff members recognise that the cause of inappropriate behaviour may be best assisted through participation in the wellbeing program, led by
the Wellbeing Coordinator. Each staff member, assisted by professional learning in programs such as ‘Yarning Up on Trauma’ and ‘Calmer Classrooms’, has a number of strategies to manage inappropriate behaviour in their classrooms. Worawa’s Positive Behaviour Management Policy (Appendix 5) encourages appropriate behaviour. All staff members have a merit book and when students display any of the four values, they may receive a merit. Merits are celebrated at the school Assembly and are aggregated for end of term acknowledgment.

3.2.5 Student Leadership

The development of leadership skills in students is a strong focus at Worawa. Christie (2011) after consultation with Elders in the Northern Territory identifies the understanding of giftedness in an Aboriginal community is closely associated with leadership qualities.

Awards for leadership are given to students on Presentation Day. There are three awards: The Worawa Leadership Award, The Emerging Leader Award and the Long Tan Award. The criteria for the Worawa Leadership Award are:

- being proactive
- gaining trust
- being reliable and
- acting as a role model to others.

The Emerging Leader Award goes to a student who has begun to take control of her own learning and is often seen helping others in the classroom. The recipient of this award must also be interested in taking her new knowledge back to her community. The criterion for the Long Tan Award is teamwork. The recipient of this award must be a thoughtful, helpful and caring member of a team. The Australian Defence Force presents this award. Relationship building underpins the criteria for all the awards.

In other segments of this Section there is significant evidence of students meeting all the above criteria in varying degrees. When Alliyanna in her interview, was asked, “What would you do if you saw other students doing something you are not happy about? Would you go to Aunty Lois? She replied:

I don’t go to Aunty Lois much. I just talk to those who are doing wrong things. I just talk to them.

In this statement Alliyanna demonstrates her relationship with those girls, making it possible for her to act in this manner. Staff members often observe such a response; a number commented on the initiative of the senior girls in dealing with these types of situations.

Andrea, one of two students, who confidently delivered a speech at ‘Debutante Dreaming’, recognises herself as a leader and demonstrates her relationship with all the girls at Worawa by concluding her speech with this message to them:

All you need is the 4Rs: We have been guided by the 4 Worawa Ways:

- Respect: to respect ourselves and others
- Rigour: to keep going when the times are tough
- Relationship: to build positive relationships with our peers
• **Responsibility**: to own up to your mistakes and take on the role of being an older girl.

Similarly, Alliyanna, who also confidently delivered a speech, demonstrated leadership and her relationship with all the girls at Worawa, by concluding her speech saying:

*If I could give a message to the young girls coming up at Worawa, it would be:*

- Remember our Worawa Ways.
- Build strong friendships and relationships.
- Use rigour and try your best.
- Have goals for your future and try to make them come true.

Jaden, in her interview, named leadership as one of her responsibilities, meaning she must set a good example for other girls. Responsibility was given to Alliyanna and Regina when they became Principals for a Day. The honour was bestowed because they were the two students who had been at Worawa the longest. Alliyanna said she enjoyed:

*Being the Principal for the Day yesterday, with my friend, Regina.*

Regina said:

*I just enjoyed principal for the day. We had to do the acknowledgement.*

The College also has a Student Representative Council (SRC) with five members. They meet regularly to discuss various aspects of College life and to represent the collective student body at events or in advancing an idea to the College Executive.

**Link to**: Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Key Enabling Factor Three
Section 3: Literature Review: Leadership in an Ecological Model

### 3.3 Building Respectful, Responsible Relationships with Community Members

3.3.1 **Communicating with Community Members: Community Forum**

Communication with Community members who send their children to Worawa is a major focus of the College community. The annual Community Forum was held at Worawa on December 9th, 2013. All present indicated their place of residence on map of Australia (List of Attendees, Appendix 1). These included remote Northern Territory, Darwin, Central Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. Natasha, a mother of a student comments:

*Doesn't matter where we are from, we all come together at Worawa.*

Aunty Lois always commences the proceedings by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land and paying respects to Ancestors. She then describes aspects of the educational opportunities available at Worawa. Aunty Lois emphasises
the love and respect of all the staff for the girls in their care and the holistic approach to education, with succinct statements:

Wellbeing concentrates on things that may be bothering them.
The girls are able to use language and also read the Koorie Mail.
They live in shared accommodation so all mobs mix - a lot of learning goes on in the houses.
The girls have good relationships with teachers.
After school, the boarding house staff look after the girls.
Every week a female GP comes to the school and we have a nurse working at the school.

Aunty Lois also describes morning Circle Time where all acknowledge the Wurundjeri Ancestors and they recite the school poem at each assembly. She stresses:

Respect, especially for land and each other; respect for each other is very strong at Worawa, also respect for all staff and the school rules - rules that we have in place to make the school a very special place.

The long-term results are encapsulated:

It is beautiful to watch the girls grow and develop. To see they know how to look after themselves and to see them speaking publicly in a restaurant, knowing how to behave in a social setting. They are also developing skills to read and write in English, so as they can get jobs when they go back into community.

The respect of the community members, including parents and grandparents for Aunty Lois is obvious in the undivided attention they give her.

Staff members are then introduced to the participants and they briefly describe their affection for the girls in their care and their role in student learning at Worawa.

Kim, Head of the Boarding Program, sets her speech at the Community Forum in the context of the ‘Worawa Way’:

Everything we do hinges round the ‘4R’s’

She commences with Relationship and talks about the girls’ relationship with the boarding staff. Kim also speaks about the place of Restorative Practice in the residential program. Building self-esteem is central. She links Responsibility to having to “do chores” in the house and the Rigour associated with this, for example:

Keeping the routines we have in the boarding house
Straightening up their chairs and tidying the tables
Showering and keeping themselves clean
Keeping sporting commitments - they must play unless injured.

Kim also itemises the types of consequences if these duties are neglected. Respect is demonstrated through care for the beautiful property and well-appointed houses and
respect for people is demonstrated by the way conversations are conducted. Throughout, Kim stresses:

Staff love your girls and treat them accordingly.

3.3.1.1 Contributions from the Community members

The community representatives and the staff members of Worawa also participate in an activity to document the understanding of The Worawa Way in communities. These are documented and are at Appendix 1. The understanding of each is broad and ranges from traditional to contemporary elements. The community members also document their aspirations for education at Worawa. The major focus is continuing education and subsequent employment. Some creative ideas surface for projects that might be introduced at school, for example creating their own bush medicines and designing and marketing clothes. They also document concerns for girls transitioning from Worawa and express the wish for further year levels to be catered for at Worawa. If it is not possible for Worawa to introduce years 11 and 12, the Community members suggest the possibility of providing boarding facilities for those attending other schools.

It is obvious to an observer that here there is a demand for education. Pearson (2004) says there needs to be such a demand if education is to be successful; Hooley (2009) adds that this demand must come from the whole community not only those who are school age. The seeking of input from the community members is also consonant with Hooley’s (ibid) notion of the extension of the democratic classroom to whole school decision-making, by the inclusion of families and community members in the process, and through this inclusion all actions in the school reflect the democratic nature of society. This approach renders education relevant in the moment and so education becomes a process of living (Dewey, 1897).

Link to: Section 3: Literature Review: Contextualisation
Enabling Learning Student and Parent Voice
Appendix 16: Community Forum Report 2014
3.4 Students’ and staff members’ understanding of how they build relationships

3.4.1 Students’ Understanding

The data generated by the following students clearly identifies connectedness to their peers. This is a protective factor as described by Resnick, Harris & Blum, (1993). Protective factors are “those factors that buffer against the stresses of everyday life that might otherwise result in adverse physical, social or psychological outcomes for youth” (p. 3).

In this section, Kira and the 2014 senior students, Alliyanna, Andrea, Hakira, Jaden, Jamira, Kahealea, Maxine, Regina and Sasha, some of whom will complete Year 10 and move to further educational institutions in 2015, express their understanding of building relationships at school.

All students say making friends has been the most important aspect of their time at Worawa. Kahealea says, students have “the same understanding of each other” and she feels accepted by the Worawa community. She feels accepted:

because I have a pretty good relationship with all the girls. Everyone exchanges smiles and says ‘Hi’ and we hang out sometimes”. Worawa is a very supportive school – not only the staff but the students: if you feel sad, girls you don’t even know come up to you and sit with you.

Maxine corroborated her thoughts:

Everyone is really nice and supportive. Mainly everyone is all friendly to you. They give you a warm welcome to the school even though you might not know anyone. I thought it would be hard but it was easy as people who didn’t know me just came up to me and started talking to me – they were really nice.

This is very different from their experiences in previous schools.
Jaden adds another dimension when she states:

>*We are all like sisters here – I have all brothers at home so when I came here I wasn’t used to being with girls all the time but when I went home I thought, “What am I going to do? Because I don’t have all my sisters here!*

Zarkema, who had attended a number of different schools prior to her coming to Worawa says that previously she found it hard to make friends but at Worawa:

>*Your friends are more like your sisters. They make you feel like you’ve known them for years.*

She adds:

>*It’s a place where teenage girls may not like you but they are nice enough to talk to you.*

Kira also likens the boarding experience to family life:

>*At first it is really hard because you don’t know the girls. But once you get to know the girls it is fun and in the houses the girls really become your sisters and the house parents become your other Mum – and you get to know everybody very easily – it is very comfortable – it’s kinda like my family away from home.*

At Worawa, relationships are such that Kahealea is able to speak about her Aboriginal culture, something she felt unable to do elsewhere:

>*I knew about my tribal group but it was something I never spoke about because it’s difficult to speak to a non-Indigenous person about it.*
She learns about Aboriginal culture and laws from girls from communities, and those who have language have taught her words and phrases. This has happened over time:

When I first came I found it really hard to communicate with girls from communities. We didn’t have common language and understanding of each other. Now it is easier when you understand why they don’t talk to you so much. They are shy and I guess they found a girl who speaks fluent English and has white skin, scary for them.

Regina, a girl from a remote community learns about the culture of other remote communities from her friends. Speaking of a particular friend she say:

She would tell me everything, about her culture and I tell my culture to her too.

She feels very comfortable at Worawa:

Worawa’s feel like home to me and all the girls are like sisters. The girls at Worawa, we are all sisters.

While Regina settled well, her two cousins did not:

I bring my two cousins first and them two don’t like Worawa. Them two get mad with other girls.

Alliyanna, a girl who describes herself as being shy when she first came to Worawa, also learns through friends from other communities:

As I spent more time at Worawa I began to enjoy making friends from other communities. We like to do singing and dancing together. We teach each other our songs and dances.
She also says the best experience she has had at Worawa, is:

*Meeting my good friend, Regina. We come from opposite ends of the Northern Territory, but we have become very close friends. She makes me laugh. She is a true friend.*

Regina says that making relationships with friends and teachers was a catalyst for her in coming to like being at Worawa:

*I don’t like school much when first I bin come here. I was like sick ‘n tired school. I wish I was at home most time with Mum. I like school now.*

Respect is linked to relationship as Kahealea further describes her relationship with girls from community:

*When I first came I would say horrible things about them when they talked in language. I would say “Stop talking language! Speak English!” I guess I listened and asked them to teach it to me because it is unique and how lucky they are that they get to speak their language.*

Sasha also makes the link by saying:

*When I first got there everyone was friendly to me we were showing respect to each other.*

She also found the girls from her remote community very helpful:

*When I first came I was quiet and Tanya was the one who came up to girls and said, “This is Sasha” and said their name. Yeah and then I get*
to know some of the girls here at Worawa.

Andrea describes respectful relationships:

*You have to understand each other before you start having a respectful relationship. You can’t judge, you have to listen and let other people listen to you as well.*

Kahealea is a member of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and sees it as her responsibility to take care of the younger girls because:

*I was in that place before. It is hard to stop being naughty – you get into the wrong friendship groups because they are the only ones who accept you.*

Andrea also helps the younger girls, particularly when they are feeling homesick. She comforts and encourages others with statements such as:

*You’ve only got a little bit longer to go.  
There’s no point in going to school and not doing anything.  
I’m here for them if they want to talk about it or want a hug.*

Janz & Sumner (2013) maintain that a “more considered approach to conflict” (p. 3) engenders greater resilience. A “more considered approach” is evident in the following statements from the students.

Conflict resolution was discussed in the context of Kahealea’s relationship with her sister. Both have participated in the ‘Take Two’ program, run out of Berry St. Kahealea cites the benefits of the program:

*When me and Hakira first came we couldn’t talk to each other because we didn’t have good communicating skills. We would always fight. Now when we have a fight it is easier to solve in a respectful way because we can communicate with each other.*

Jamira says any sort of conflict makes her feel as if

*Worawa’s not my home any more.*

She says she has learned that instead of being angry or becoming violent, there are other ways to address issues. These include:

*Speaking ‘one on one’ with the person involved.  
Apologise.  
Speak to someone I can trust.*
Jamira describes a Restorative Practice session she attended:

_You could feel the tension; it felt serious and we felt we were both mature enough to forgive each other. We understand each other a lot more now, so whenever there’s a moment of “what did you mean by that”, we help each other understand._

Further understanding is revealed when she adds:

_I misunderstood, sometimes I misunderstand things and I just take it the wrong way._

In her speech at Presentation Day 2013, Zarkema said:

_Every time I got upset and thought things were unfair I’d get angry and cry and curse the school but now I realise it’s for my own good and it will help me a better person in the future._

**Link to**: Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Enabling Factors 3.4 & 3.7
Section 3: Literature Review: Contextualisation
Enabling Education Student and Parent Voice

3.4.2 *Academic and Wellbeing Staff Members Building Relationships*

Academic and Wellbeing staff members build relationships through their common interest in their students’ wellbeing and learning. In other segments of this Section there is significant evidence of relationship building with students. Wellbeing
staff members have regular professional conversations with each other and are connected and empowered by these. Professional relationships for the teachers are fostered formally, by participation in Professional Learning Teams and a daily briefing for 30 minutes before each day commences. In addition, the members of the research team observed many conversations in the staffroom that provide evidence that the professional learning community extends well beyond formal meetings of Professional Learning Teams and staff meetings. Teachers are connected and empowered through their intense interest in student learning and improvement. In the Learning Areas where there is more than one teacher, vibrant discussions take place to support each other in implementing successful strategies. Teachers are obviously pleased when they discover that they, either alone or in partnership with another teacher, assist students in their learning.

Observed too, are the spontaneous conversations, arising in the staff room, to assist a teacher who finds the preparation of a particular unit onerous. In this situation, the teacher has only to voice the difficulty to one other staff member in order to obtain assistance. As the two commence discussions at the table, other teachers appear from their workstations to take part in the conversation and to offer empathy and assistance. Very soon a list of resources is compiled, and after this brainstorm, they all begin to plot a course of action, sharing ideas and adding to each other’s bank of knowledge in the particular area. Constant in the conversation, is reference to appropriate content for the students to learn and the pedagogical approach that will assist their learning. Soon the teacher, who initially sought assistance, is able to return to their workstation and continue preparation. All are connected and empowered, as the individual feels supported and has a plan for implementation and those who assisted are energised by the conversation, have learned more about the topic from their peers and feel more comprehensively, the power of the professional learning community. Enabling this process is the interest of all in the improvement of student learning.

Thus the concept of ‘power with’ (Macy, 1983) and Power1 (Sarra, 2011) is evident among the teachers as a group. They feel a strong sense of belonging to their learning community and certainly they understand that as Macy says, “they enhance their own and each others capacities” (p. 31). As far as an external observer can ascertain, they extend their understanding of themselves as a community, to the extent that their responsibility to themselves and their responsibility to each other is hardly distinguishable.

3.4.3 The Boarding House Staff Members

Boarding house staff members also build relationships through their common interest in their students’ wellbeing and learning. In other segments of this Section there is significant evidence of relationship building with students. Relationships with each other are developed through daily conversations, common professional learning activities and regular staff meetings. To further develop relationships they attend social gatherings. There is a monthly breakfast for the weekday team and monthly lunches for the weekend team. In addition there is a dinner each term for all.
3.5 Community Members’ Understanding of Relationships at Worawa

3.5.1 Parent and Grandparents

All the parents and grandparents interviewed valued the staff at Worawa and some commented on the safe environment. Marg commented:

_The teachers here actually take care of them and are interested in them. They’ve got somewhere safe – it’s an environment they feel comfortable in – I feel comfortable here._

Natasha also said:

_Some of the teachers been to community, they’ve seen and they can comfort our children here……. Here they all understand all the house parents, the teachers; they understand how fragile our kids can be from growing up in community lifestyle……. When she was in community I would always worry about her – looking for her and trying to juggle my work at the same time. When she is here, I just sit back and relax._

Another parent Sheryl, said to Aunty Lois, noting the effect of relationship, in the context of prior learning and the consequent building of relevant curriculum:

_You have people on staff, who will listen; my daughter is not just a another number in the school. Here they are listening to her. She is getting everything she needs and is not rushed so she doesn’t shut down – she is absorbing._

Experiences at school are understood as life changing. Marg spoke of the initial reluctance of her granddaughters to go to Worawa and the change after a short time:

_First it was really, I don’t want to go because - but the first week away they loved it, absolutely loved it. They rang me up and I said “It is good. I’m glad you love it.”_

Speaking of one in particular she says:

_She talks to me and in her voice its happy, her look, in everything she is happy, more confident in what she does now, which is really great….. She showed me all around her house and her friends._

Miriam described a similar experience with her daughter:

_It was a shock for me yesterday when I got here – a big cuddle and she said I’m coming back here and I was happy._
Josephine’s quoted her daughter as saying:

“I’m liking it here. It’s like my home and I’m learning - getting along with other girls and staff”.

And added,

“It’s really good for her”.  
So probably Worawa’s lifted her somewhere.

Lorraine added a humorous note, indicating her daughter’s admiration for and confidence in, her relationship with staff:

She loves all the staff. She gets on well with all the staff and yesterday was mimicking them all – she could do it really well she’s a great actor!

In speaking of other students, Judy said her granddaughter:

spends time with the girls, they share things together.

Marg contrasted the disciplined approach at Worawa to the lack of discipline evident in their local high school. Her granddaughter says she has:

different friends, a different life. I said, “You haven’t got any rat bags here have you?”

Her granddaughter agreed there are only positive role models among her friends. Marg comments further:

She does sport ………There’s something different about that kid….  
They have grown up and they have a different outlook which is really good. She said, “I haven’t changed.” And I said, “Yes you have and it is a change for the better”.

According to parents the changes brought about in their daughters during their time at Worawa are many and varied. They are a result of the development of respectful relationships that affect learning and are expressed with emotion:

She has found the space to be herself here that she hadn’t found before. She feels accepted here where before she’s always felt out of place where she’s been before. Academically she’s very proud of her progress. She wants to come back next year. (Jan)

She’s a changed girl she’s matured. She’s having adult conversations. I watched her today in choir when she was up there in front of all those parents; it brought tears to my eyes. I thought, “That’s my baby”! That was brilliant, she’s out there she’s got the confidence. We’ve got a lot of work to go but it’s working whatever this country is giving her it’s working. (Sheryl)
She lacked social skills and just to see her develop in that area has been fantastic. She was always very quiet and close to Mum and wouldn’t do anything without me actually being there. But for her to actually step out and do the things she wants and talk to everyone. It is wonderful for her to be here. (Lorraine)

Every term when she goes back she is bright and happy. She likes it here and there’s much more she wants to learn. She rang and said, “Nana I want to be nurse and I got a shock. And I am very happy. We need more health workers in our community”. (Mildred)

She didn’t want to do anything back at community and this environment really changed her. The DVD I showed you on my iPad. She would never have done that three years ago; she could do it but didn’t have the confidence to do it. The 4Rs relationship, respect and responsibility that you talk about and you always talk about – she gets it and that’s what we need more in our young girls, the power and the willingness to do it and to know why we do it. We can do anything. We can step up and live the two worlds that we are living, our traditional and the other. (Natasha)

Natasha says:

School has brought her out of her shell.

And Tom agrees with Natasha:

The first time I saw her stand up and dance I was shocked. And I was really proud of her. Thanks to Worawa.

Natasha adds and Tom agrees:

We can see also changes in the way she speaks to us and offering to clean the house, rather than being told to clean the house. Once we went hunting and we came back and the whole house was clean – it wouldn’t have happened before she came to Worawa.

Jan extends the discussion of relationships to include discussions with academic and boarding staff members and the value of this for her granddaughter’s education:

She thought boarding school might be more lenient. She has discovered that my connection with the academic and boarding staff is very strong, so there aren’t any deals to be done. I talk regularly to the school and school talks regularly to me, so I think she’s learnt very quickly that rules are rules whether at home or here and she needs to understand what they are and do it or suffer the consequences – she’s adjusting.
Jan articulates the ease of her relationship with various staff members and the peace of mind this gives her:

*I find it very easy to talk to the boarding staff. I talk regularly to Kim to the health staff, academic staff, and Aunty Lois. Kim can text me and we have that great contact. It is reassuring to my granddaughter that we know when she’s won at netball or she’s won an award or she needs help. And it’s very reassuring for me, as it’s a big thing to send her away from her siblings, her home and from me, so I need to know she’s happy and well.*

3.5.2 *Academic Staff and Community Members*

Staff members stress the importance of knowing the families. Raelene says, when establishing relationships with students, teachers need to:

*be open and talk and find out who they are, their families, where they have come from, where they are going, discuss their dreams and encourage. Students want to build relationships with us.*

Relationship building is a reciprocal process and Rani notes that the parents of two of the teachers have come to the College and the teachers have introduced them to the girls, an action that goes well beyond their professional role. This is very beneficial in developing meaningful relationships. Dean is one of these teachers and his mother has come to the College to assist him organise resources. She is a Teacher Aide in another school. The girls really enjoy meeting teachers’ families as family means so much to them. Dean took the girls to a concert to assist him to get to know them. Here they spoke to the band members:

*One Indigenous artist spoke to the girls about the importance of education and now they want to come back to continue their education.*

His mother has accompanied them on two school outings and:

*The girls are very responsive to her. She gets hugs from the girls – so different from the others schools she has worked in.*

While these relationships do not directly involve community members, they are building on the respect the girls have for family.

3.5.2.1 *College Liaison*

An Indigenous teacher at Worawa, who has the role of visiting families in remote communities, says that families find Worawa very appealing because their young women:

*don’t have to give up being Aboriginal in order to get an education.*
A teacher who has visited communities easily develops relationships with girls coming to Worawa for the first time, as in most cases she has already met the girls and established a relationship with people in the girls’ communities. At the commencement of semester 2, 20 of the 25 students from remote areas had already been met by a teacher:

If I haven’t met them I have met the families as I helped them with the enrolment forms.

Parents want the students to have an education but are unaware of the ramifications and how they will translate back into community. Relationship with the College is important:

For them to have a relationship with the school is so important, especially at the beginning of term, as we get them back again. I knew the kids when they arrived better than most others here.

Parents also need to know that Worawa is a safe place.

Some students, when they first came:

didn’t have a phone and their home phone numbers are in my phone so they used my phone. I was their link to what they knew.

Some new students are totally overwhelmed, as they have never been far from their homes. The visiting teacher firmly believes that continual contact with the community while the girls are at school develops a productive relationship. She often sends a photo or a message, communicating something positive about their daughters.

Respect for the College must be won, as people in communities are largely distrustful of boarding schools:

I am able to build the name for Worawa so parents respect the school, understand Worawa and what we are doing. Other schools demand less respect than we do – students there behave and treat their teachers differently.

In the College, students’ communities are constantly referenced and often staff members say:

Start from what they know and can do and take them from there.

If respect is maintained, then parents will communicate this to their daughters. They will be convinced that the way Worawa operates is better. Parents:

can relate to ……..’s Mum – her statement is powerful – families in communities when they watch that – woman before a mum– they want the same thing. On the ground, as we teach, we have to make sure we are doing these things.
3.6 Building Respectful, Responsible Relationships in the Boarding Houses

The residential program provides a safe and secure ‘home’ environment as students deal with the complicated issues experienced by all young women in the crucial teenage years, and which can be especially acute in Aboriginal girls as they struggle to overcome early negative experiences and maintain connection to their Aboriginal heritage, while making a place for themselves in the mainstream world of higher education and work.

(‘The Worawa Way’ pamphlet: Appendix 2)

3.6.1 Perspectives of Boarding Staff Members

The following contributions by the staff of the Boarding School reflect:

“An enabling learning environment is one where children feel secure, where there is an absence of fear, and which is governed by relationships of equality and equity”

(National Curriculum Framework, India, 2005)

Kim, Head of the Boarding Program, speaks of fostering a sense of belonging at Worawa:

Where the girls live, they are homes not dormitories. They share a bedroom and these homes reflect the personality of each house parent. Each house has a term budget of $100 to buy what they want, something like a hard drive or board games.

Kim values the reflection of the personalities of the house parents in the houses, as this engenders a sense of connectedness among the girls. Responsibility follows as the
girls care for their houses; they are responsible for all areas with the exceptions of the bathrooms, which are professionally cleaned. The house parents communicate the expectations and see these are maintained. The girls in the residence for transitioning students have more responsibility, as they do not have a house parent monitoring them. Certain privileges are attached to the appropriate maintenance of the cleanliness of their house. Kim understands that quality of staff is important in relationship development and the responsibility that accompanies this. She says:

*Everyone in the residential team is on the same page. I have made a number of changes since I came here and while some didn’t agree they came on board.*

Respect for the space in which they live is demonstrated in the way the girls look after the space and each other. The manner in which they speak to each other and how they adopt a respectful attitude are important indicators of respect, according to Kim. If a student does not comply, the consequence must be something achievable by the student herself, not something she can assign to someone else.

Until there is a sense of belonging and Worawa becomes their home during term time, many girls suffer from homesickness. All interviewees have strategies to cope with this. These include making a term calendar and putting on this calendar all the events at school and the things the girl misses at home; also having the girl call her mother at 8pm well before bedtime, so she can talk to the staff before going to bed. Other strategies include praying with the girl, using Mindfulness approaches, displaying photos of family, offering time to talk at length and asking other students known to the particular girl, to assist.

The staff members know that respectful relationships are built when they see girls taking responsibility for the wellbeing of other girls who are feeling homesick. Often these girls are responsible for their siblings at home and this responsibility extends to the members of the Worawa family. They also know respectful relationships are developing when they see returning students greet those from other communities. Kim says:

*It’s like they’ve come back to their family.*
The sense of family extends to feelings of anxiety amongst Kim and the house parents, when the girls are going for the holidays. They are concerned that some may be going to places where there is no routine and they may not have the nourishment they have at the College.

Lyn and Francina both stressed the manner of speaking with the girls, as conducive to the development of respectful relationships. Francina says:

Rather than being confrontational I used humour, stories and analogies to get them thinking about their behaviour and get them to change the way they approach things.

Lyn says:

I am always calm and never speak down to them. These are teenagers we are dealing with; if you show them respect, they will respect you. I come back from breakfast and I am amazed that the house is cleaner than when I left.

She adds:

They like music when they are doing chores and they like my music, which is old-fashioned. I think music helps them interact with each other and with me.

3.6.1.1 Challenges

Boundaries and routine are important for students for living in the boarding house. The staff set these and the challenge for them, is to constantly maintain them.

Kim notes the importance of building respectful relationships with parents of students and other community members. This can be challenging, as there is not an automatic trusting relationship. Time is needed to build such a relationship. Her approach is to ring the parent and introduce herself, give her mobile telephone number and communicate the hours she is available for them to speak with her. She wishes the parent to be very aware that she really knows and cares about their daughter. This involves sending texts, phone messages, photos and good news, for example the attainment of a merit certificate. This can be particularly challenging when she and the parents have little language in common or as is often the case in remote communities, mobile phone numbers change frequently. When students are returning, Kim rings them the week before, inquires after their activities during the holidays and reminds them of the interesting things they have planned at the College for the first week of term.

When the girls are at the College, Kim says her greatest responsibility is to keep them safe both at school and at outside venues. She believes they feel safe when they have boundaries and so she makes an effort to communicate these efficiently and effectively. Kim says a returning student’s comment:
**Kim, I missed you and your strict rules while I was away.**

was “music to her ears”.

Another physical challenge for the girls is returning to cold weather at the beginning of second semester. In order to overcome their discomfort, the College provides each child with warm and appropriate clothing for the cold. The social aspect of girls living in close proximity to one another can also be a challenge. If certain girls are finding it difficult to cope with relationships in a house, they are assisted to develop the skills to adapt. If after time they cannot cope, these students are re-located to another house. The house parents recognise each house as having a different atmosphere and say that certain girls are more comfortable in the atmosphere of one house, rather than another.

Sammy notes the challenge of having fewer staff on the weekend. As there is no chef, the weekend house parents prepare the meals. A positive outcome of this is that the girls assist in preparing the meals and so attain additional skills. The challenge for the staff members is to create a structured approach, enabling them to skill the girls, as well as cater effectively. Overall, she says the staff members rise to the challenge. She comments:

*We have an amazing ability to do the best with what we have.*

**Link to:** Section 3: Literature Review: Contextualisation

Enabling Education Student and Parent Voice

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3.6.2 Students’ Understanding of Responsibility in the Boarding House

All girls interviewed identified completion of chores, making their beds, cleaning the house and making sure their clothes are clean as responsibilities they have in the boarding house. Maxine adds:

*Making sure I go to bed on time.*

Jaden admits she has taken this responsibility beyond school life when she says:

*I do that at home now.*

As well as responsibility for the physical aspects of the house and herself, Andrea develops the concept to include her actions and attitudes:

*Watch the way I act*
*Interacting with the girls – being nice*
*Make wise decisions and choices*
*I need to learn because I will be 18 and should be independent and learning is my way out of being a kid*
*Homework*
All the girls when asked to whom they would go if they had a problem included the house parents in their discussion. Zarkema described them in her speech on Presentation Day, 2013 as people who “make you feel at home”. Thus there is evidence that all students have access to at least one caring adult, an important protective factor expressed in MindMatters (2000), “connectedness to one caring adult is sufficient to foster resilience” (p.12)

3.7 Partnerships

3.7.1 Projects with Partner Schools

The Worawa Partner Schools Program involves schools working together for social, cultural or sporting exchange around key dates on the Worawa Cultural Calendar. Partner schools identify an area of focus, they wish to undertake with Worawa. This provides the foundation for shared learning experiences. These could be for cultural and social exchange, art, music, environmental science, Aboriginal technology or sport. Partner schools include Trinity Grammar School, Presbyterian Ladies College, Scotch College, Melbourne Grammar School, Shelford Girls’ Grammar, Mount Evelyn Christian School, Healesville High School, Methodist Ladies College, Melbourne Girls Grammar School, Yarra Valley Grammar School, Tintern Schools, Genazzano FCJ College.

The story of the Worawa’s partnerships with these schools, embodies Townsend’s (2014) understanding, that true partnerships go well beyond collaboration in a narrow sense and incorporate the building of relationships, and the transformation of these relationships from good to extraordinary. The partnerships also address Louth’s (2012) and Sarra’s (2011) understanding that the nurturing of community-wide respect for Aboriginal people and their culture, in itself will lead to enhanced self-esteem within Aboriginal communities. (http://worawa.vic.edu.au/partners/)
3.7.1.1 Sporting Carnivals

Worawa hosts sporting carnivals at various times in the year. One such carnival celebrates Reconciliation Week.

3.7.1.1.1 Reconciliation Sports Carnival

The Worawa Reconciliation Sports Carnival, for the fourteenth time was held during Reconciliation Week, in May 2014. Fourteen schools took part in sporting, social and cultural exchange. It was advertised as a fun day to come together in the Spirit of Reconciliation for sporting and cultural exchange. A main event was a football match between Worawa, a team comprised of ex-Worawa students and local Aboriginal young men and Melbourne Grammar School, to vie for the Sir Douglas Nicholls Memorial Trophy. A BBQ lunch and a popular local band added to the carnival atmosphere.

Worawa, keen to field an Indigenous football team capable of providing a real challenge to Melbourne Grammar in a friendly and keenly competitive game, advertised for male Indigenous players between the ages of 15 and 18. Worawa girls were field and boundary umpires, scorekeepers, water carriers and cheer squad. After the match Worawa Facebook page (https://www.Facebook.com/pages/Worawa-Aboriginal-College-Official-Page/222579758745) featured a:

thank you to all the boys that made up the 'Very Deadly' Worawa team at our Reconciliation Sports Carnival. The talent of all players was evident. The story aired on Channel 9 News tonight.

The Facebook page also pays tribute to the Worawa girls’ netball team:

Worawa netball team was impressive at our Reconciliation Sports Carnival - a Round Robin of 8 teams vied for the Naomi Atkinson Memorial Trophy.

On the day Uncle Max commenced proceedings with a Smoking Ceremony. Aunty Lois welcomed all saying:

We pay our respects to the land and to our spirit ancestor Bunjil, the creator who looks after us in this area. We acknowledge the past but we are coming together in the true spirit of reconciliation and we are looking to the future, where we can walk together as one in this country.

Assistant Police Commissioner Emmet Dunne and colleagues from the Victoria Police coached the football team. Emmet described this as a unique opportunity for the Police members to connect with the Indigenous community. Such opportunities are important because:

building and maintaining trust is hard because of decades and
decades of poor treatment and dispossession of country. I understand how important country is to the Indigenous community. We work at building relationship and this is a good opportunity for us to break down the barriers and get to know the leaders of tomorrow – they will take it forward.


Worawa has also built relationships with other local police officers from Healesville Police Station. Senior Sergeant, Stewart Thompson encourages this and invites the students to his farming property to take part in canoeing activities. In addition, Kirsty, a policewoman comes to dinner with the girls every week and brings another colleague with her. As a result of this relationship the Police netball team has come and played a match with the Worawa girls. Senior Sergeant Thompson and the local Community Liaison Officer attended the Parent Forum and Presentation Day.

3.7.1.1.2 'Dreamtime at the G’

Some Worawa girls took part in the ‘Dreamtime at the G’ by umpiring the Auskick games at half time. This is a significant responsibility, particularly as the arena is foreign territory and the children unknown. They acquitted themselves very creditably in what is a challenging undertaking. Former umpire Neville Nash trained the girls at the College, prior to their taking charge on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. A photo of this training and the girls umpiring is on the Worawa Facebook page:
3.7.1.1.3 **Challenges**

The challenges of conducting sporting carnivals are evident in the collegial discussion that took place in a meeting of College personnel on September 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2014. The purpose of the meeting was to de-brief all concerned in a recent Sports’ Day, conducted at Worawa. Partner schools participated in the events.

Aunty Lois chaired the meeting. This was a whole school event and thanks were extended to all staff members who contributed to its success. Congratulations were also extended to Aboriginal Elder Uncle Max, who led the smoking ceremony and engaged each person directly in the process. Students worked with Ruth from the William Angliss Institute in the hospitality tent, making coffee and serving. The girls received formal credits for this in their Hospitality course. It was noted they learned manual skills including the operation of the coffee machine and also learned to “meet and greet”, a function they performed very creditably. It was estimated that eighty percent of students had a role to play and they did so very well. Acknowledgement and thanks were extended to Henry and Fergil for the preparation of the grounds as. Dean declared the day was generally:

*Much better than last year when he was a visitor*

It was agreed by all, that it was the best day ever.

Discussion ranged from the improvement of power supply for future events to the suitability of infrastructure and its most appropriate placement and use, the suitability and cost of food, the placement of the Welcome Ceremony and the various routines contributing to the efficiency of the movement of people around the property as well as their accessibility to a suitable viewing spot.
Suggestions for future years include:

- the employment of an Indigenous musician and artist,
- the girls performing a song,
- methods of drying the ground to facilitate walking for visitors,
- re-designing the space under the art gallery and
- allowing the Elders to sit on the balcony to view the games,
- assistance for Uncle Max to light the fire,
- larger signs indicating the locality of Indigenous games,
- extending the rosters by adding help for Lisa,
- supply of free coffee and tea for the invitees and offered by the girls, and
- some type of presentation for the sponsors.

This concluded a thorough evaluation of the day’s activities and all that supported these.

3.7.1.2 Partnership with Scotch College

Scotch College is an all boys’ school in Hawthorn a suburb of Melbourne. The Scotch College Partnership grew out of the two schools commitment to building respectful relationships through sport, social and cultural exchange at the time that Worawa was a co-educational school. The partnership involved students in the Scotch College Indigenous Partnership Program participating in the Worawa Reconciliation Sports Carnival. When Worawa became an all-girls school, the schools maintained the partnership, which saw the starting point of an exciting collaboration.

Today the Scotch, Worawa partnership consists of a number of visits between the two schools during which time students are involved in various curriculum-based projects. The aim of each project is to devise tasks that will facilitate two-way learning between students. Tasks for Scotch boys are culturally based and for Worawa girls have a focus on literacy, research, art and craft, media and information technology skills. Students from each school are assigned to work in pairs on given activities. A group of 10 boys and 10 girls were involved in each of the following projects:

Group 1: Research/Information Technology Project

This group had access to the Scotch College library and Information Technology facilities, as well as materials from Worawa. The group focused on researching the history of Coranderrk, including looking at the role of Simon Wonga, William Barak and other leaders of the various Kulin Clans that came together at that time. The research was then loaded onto a Wiki, a mini web-site to form part of the girls’ Digital Portfolio.

Group 2: Art/Craft Project

The aim of this group was to make and decorate a possum skin cloak under the guidance of Aboriginal artist Maree Clark. This group had to first learn about the place of craft in Victorian Aboriginal culture. They then chose a theme for the cloak, which became the story represented on each pelt. The theme was ‘Birrarung’ the Yarra River on which both schools are situated. The work involved identifying or
researching totems of participants and sharing the stories with Scotch students. Students then sewed the pelts together to make the finished cloak, which was presented to Worawa for display in the schools’ onsite gallery.

Group 3: Media Project

The focus for this group was to make a film of one or both of the projects above in the form of a documentary. This included recording interviews with students and presenters visiting Bunjilaka and the Koorie Heritage Trust and taking footage of each part of the process of making the possum skin cloak. Students learnt about handling digital video cameras, uploading and editing footage using appropriate programs, creating a film including soundtrack and other filmic elements.

In 2014 Worawa students arrived at Scotch College during the last scheduled lesson of Thursday afternoon. Worawa students spent the first hour learning various aspects of information literacy from the College library staff. In a much larger library than Worawa’s small collection of books at the back of the English classroom, the girls were allowed to access and borrow from a selection of non-fiction and fiction resources and use the library computers to access digital resources such as online journals and articles. The Scotch College boys came to the Library during afternoon tea time and after their lessons for the day had finished. Both the girls and boys were often shy in interacting with each other so it was important for both Worawa and Scotch College staff to encourage some interaction between the students. Activities then followed that encouraged all students to communicate and share stories about their backgrounds and their education journey. This culminated in students learning how to and then developing ‘Digital story telling’ videos. They worked in small groups using editing suite computer software.

3.7.1.2.1 Learning in the Indigenous Partnership Program

Laura Kelly who currently leads the Indigenous Partnership Program, said learning with and from the girls from Worawa “is invaluable” Laura understands the foundation to be the establishment of personal relationships when she says:
Relationships develop even though everyone is a bit shy and awkward. That’s what moves things from being theoretical, (something they have seen on TV or read as part of history), to reality. They can talk to the girls about where they come from, their families and their social lives. They build the understanding that Aboriginal Culture is a living culture.

Laura also says respectful relationships between the girls and the Worawa staff members, who accompany them to Scotch College, are noted by:

seeing the way the staff and the girls relate and how the girls confide in the staff. There is so much nurturing going on there.

In addition the partnership has assisted intercultural learning for Scotch staff. As well as their personal enthusiasm to learn about Indigenous culture, the focus in the Australian Curriculum through the Cross Curriculum Priorities and the emphases in certain subjects at specific year levels, for example Year 8 Geography has renewed interest in many aspects of Indigenous culture amongst the teaching staff.

The 2014 project assisted the building of relationships as well as learning about culture, when in partners, the boys made videos with the Worawa girls. In their films they interviewed each other and inserted their own photos and added voice-overs and music as part of the production. They had to work side by side and meet a dead line on a personal project. Both in each partnership talked about family and where they grew up and how that affected them. Rigour in the process was evident as all persevered. Even though the final products varied a great deal, overall the project was successful, particularly as the focus enabled the students to work together; the students’ and teachers’ evaluations will inform future projects.

At the end of Term 3 the boys evaluated the program and were asked: What did you get out of it? What did you like the best? As well as working on their project their responses included learning how many Aboriginal languages there have been and that they have been reduced in number and also the differences between communities and surprise that they are not all the same. For some they had gained an understanding of colonial history, as they knew nothing of the history of a place such as Coranderrk.

Connection between place and land has been a significant learning for staff members, so much so that Laura wishes to incorporate a visit to Worawa in first term, the term set aside for developing the boys’ cultural awareness. Up until now this has taken place on their campus. Laura says:

I have realised that visiting Worawa is part of their cultural awareness and to visit as early as possible would be valuable.
3.7.1.2.2 Challenges

Laura stresses the partnership with Worawa is a very valuable partnership and so must be developed through a mutual relationship. She wishes to develop culturally sensitive programs and to do this understands that Scotch College staff members need to communicate and take cues from Worawa College staff members, prior to the implementation of an idea.

The school structure of Scotch College is a challenge. Timetabling and scheduling is a very high priority, as it is rare to find a day in the school year without an excursion; therefore there is a need for adequate notice of events and extra-curricula activities.

Laura’s goal is to find other ways to partner with Worawa beyond the Indigenous Partnership Program, in order that the staff members at Scotch College may learn more about the work Worawa does to bring girls from disparate backgrounds and enable them to work together. In doing so they will learn about different aspects of learning in a cultural context at Worawa, including the preservation of language through the work done in encouraging girls to use and value their Indigenous languages. An approach such as this would require staff and boys to go to Worawa more often and to learn there.
3.7.1.3 Partnership with The Wilin Centre

Deborah Cheetham (AO) is a Yorta Yorta Soprano, composer and educator. She has performed in the theatre and concert halls of Europe, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and around Australia. Deborah created Australia’s first Indigenous opera, *Pecan Summer*. In 2010, she brought together Australia’s first classically trained Indigenous ensemble to present the world premiere of *Pecan Summer* and the success of this opera led her to create the company Short Black Opera, which has since performed *Pecan Summer* in three successful seasons. Deborah served as Head of Wilin from 2011-2014 and is now the Associate Dean of Indigenous Development at the Faculty of the VCA & MCM, University of Melbourne.

Deborah Cheetham describes herself in relation to Worawa:

*I come as someone who is very much dispossessed of my culture. I am a member of the Stolen Generation. My ancestors are from this part of the world. There are so many layers to my own identity, so many gaps to fill. When I go to place like Worawa, I actually come away with more than I leave there. That's what I feel.*

Deborah is very aware of the abundant knowledge Worawa students bring. They have:

*their own sense of who they are and how they link into the place that they come from.*

She continues, marveling at the community that exists at Worawa, a community that is composed of students from many nations all over the continent of Australia. She is very supportive of the ability of Worawa to:

*bring them together and honour all of that knowledge that resides within these young women already, even at the age of 12, 13, 14. That is what Worawa has managed so beautifully.*

Deborah understands the Worawa experience to be empowering for the girls, whatever future pathway they take, because they have learned:

*that they can create a community that works for themselves and that is empowering. These young women will go back into community and see how tough it is but they will have some resources.*

She understands this is achieved through relevant programs, allowing the girls to see the relevance of their culture:

*right there, embedded in the curriculum, lived out. Every Aboriginal child on the continent deserves that. We need Worawa.*
3.7.1.3.1 Music: Program with Deborah Cheetham

Deborah Cheetham was involved in teaching music to the students in 2012. She says:

*I’m a musician and that is the way I learn about the world and that is the way I convey all of my ideas – in one form or another they will come through music.*

Deborah, with more than 20 years experience in secondary schools brought a small group of Worawa girls together in a choir and gave them some technical training in order to give them some sense of repertoire development. She comments:

*I instantly recognised these girls were no different from any others. They love music they wanted to express themselves through music; it was the obvious vehicle. They wanted to know about contemporary music and we were able to share some really amazing sessions.*

Her involvement continued beyond this initial phase because:

*Indigenous cultures are not isolated not siloed the way Western society is. The way we experience education in the Western sense is so foreign to the way Indigenous knowledge is passed on. Quick through this interaction with music, I was able to bring in other artists that would tap into their story telling, their narrative and fuse contemporary dance with that as well. These girls know that the visual and performing arts are our way of giving meaning to everything in the world.*

In discussing respect and learning Deborah says she went to Worawa to work with these girls:

*with a sense of anticipation and humility that I will gain something from this situation. There is so much knowledge there at Worawa, so much cultural identity already existing that I quickly accepted and anticipated that I was going to learn just as much as I imparted.*

Many times she said she needed to remind herself that:

*I am the one who is lacking here – I have the gap.*

and when focusing on those from remote communities:

*I can’t speak their language.*

In many respects however, Deborah found the girls at Worawa were the same as any teenage girls. Teenage girls generally find it difficult to find the full range of their voices or to sing ‘up in their heads’. She was cognisant of potential language difficulties and so chose songs that were of an appropriate language level. As was her usual modus operandi in her extensive teaching experience she carefully constructed
the repertoire to ensure success for the students. This is the hallmark of a good teacher. Deborah also notes that:

In Worawa you have to win their respect and so we needed to get to know each other. I learned to trust girls who are more comfortable speaking their own language and also learned to be at peace with that.

The Wilin Centre has always had a close bond with Worawa. Deborah says:

the VCA should be somewhere Worawa girls will want to come if they come back to Victoria. Our duty of care at Wilin is to make it so. This institution is very white, middle class but Wilin is the bridge builder, creating and maintaining pathways for students.

3.7.1.4 Partnership with the Malthouse Theatre

The Malthouse Theatre has an excellent statewide educational program called ‘The Suitcase Series.’ Wowara is a part of this. All the staff members at the Malthouse are very helpful to the Worawa students. Leigh, who coordinates the program at Worawa says the programs they have for schools are not an easy match for the Worawa girls as they are post modern and very avant-gardes. The program selects a play that goes citywide and each school develops its own production. After rehearsal time, all schools come together and perform their interpretations. Leigh is able to work with this but notes:

Our girls are quite conservative in the way they like their texts, so it is quite confronting.

She would like a program particularly developed for Aboriginal students, taking into account the Australian Professional Standard for Teachers 1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
In the Worawa Year Book, 2014, Casey notes that the girls who took part in this program described it as:

*an enjoyable, challenging and rigorous program.*

### 3.7.1.5 Partnerships with First Nations Schools

First Nations Peoples the world over have had colonising experiences that include dispossession of traditional lands, destruction of cultures, violence, genocide, forced assimilation and inequality. A common thread in cultural survival for Indigenous peoples is often linked to belief systems, spirituality and connection to traditional Land and Waters.

“I think of land as the history of my nation. It tells of how we came into being and what system we must live. My great ancestors who live in the times of history, planned everything that we practise now. The law of history says that we must not take land, fight over land, steal land, give land and so on. My land is mine only because I came in spirit from that land, and so did my ancestors of the same land ... My land, is my foundation (Galarrwuy Yunupingu)”

Partnerships with First Nations schools enable Worawa Aboriginal College to connect with communities that have similar experiences and who honour traditional beliefs and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Contemporary Indigenous education research corroborates traditional community wisdom regarding:

- The visual-spatial learning intelligence of Indigenous people.
- Kinaesthetic, hands-on learning as the Aboriginal way of learning.
- Use of symbols, metaphors and indirect, synergistic logic: creative approach
- Land links: learning linked to local land and place. Aboriginal pedagogies are ecological and place-based, drawn from the living landscape and from profound ancestral and personal relationships with place.
- Community connected, group oriented contexts connected to real life purposes are essential to learning (Yunkaporta, (2007-2009); Peeler & Yunkaporta, 2012; 8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning website).

Partnerships with First Nations schools also enable Worawa to continually affirm the philosophy on which the College was established and to honour Aboriginal pedagogies and teaching strategies. This further enables Worawa to continually enhance the focus on personalised learning, that assists students to learn about, nurture and celebrate culture. In these partnerships students and staff members are further immersed in the global complexities of the connection between culture and language. They also come to further understand and value first culture, as foundational to the development of intercultural understanding, and first culture, as foundational to preparedness to contribute to and participate in, a global world.
3.7.1.5.1 Visiting Hawaii

The establishment of the relationship with Kamehameha Schools in Honolulu began in 2008 during the World’s Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) in Melbourne when WIPCE delegates visited Worawa. Worawa was later successful in its application to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) Sister Schools Program whose objectives included:

facilitating and supporting inter-school relationships between Victorian schools and between Victorian schools and interstate and overseas schools.

This funding enabled members of Worawa Student Leadership Group to further cement the relationship with a visit to Kamehameha Schools. Kamehameha Schools holds cultural fluency and first language literacy as core to their philosophy in a similar manner to Worawa. Both schools cater exclusively for Indigenous students and operate in a cultural framework, which stresses the importance of narrative to Indigenous Peoples the world over, including their ability to express ancient beliefs and traditions through narrative, dance and song. In addition, the experiences of the Kamehameha Schools are able to inform both the development of policy and practice at Worawa College.

Both schools saw the primary goal of the partnership being in the strengthening of First Nations identity, which in turn would add integrity to the student’s navigation of the dominant cultures complexities, differences and potential pejorative influences. The 2014 WIPCE in Hawaii presented the opportunity for Worawa students to attend the conference and to experience First Nations Peoples from across the World enabling them to learn more about their place in the world of First Nations Peoples.
Mindful of the ambassador’s role that Worawa students would play in attending WIPCE, in preparation for the visit Aunty Lois determined a selection process facilitated by an interview process:

*The aim was to engage girls in the project, who were keen to learn about other cultures, cognisant of the responsibility that contact with colleges may entail, able to articulate their feelings about their own culture (whether they were well-versed in cultural life or whether they felt disenfranchised but wanting to reconnect), who were able to share their perspectives and knowledge with others and who were able to represent their people, college and themselves with confidence.*

The selected students Stephanie, Alliyanna, Shanelle, Jamira and Kahealea prepared by learning about Native Hawaiians and their culture and had Skype sessions with students of Kamehameha School. During the Skype session the students shared their names, totems, languages, songs and teen information (popular movies etc.). The sister school students shared their crafts (shark tooth jewellery) songs, chants and dances. After the session the students at Worawa had a changed perspective:

*I am so excited now, to see them and learn more. (Shanelle)*
*I was really sort of nervous, but now I see they are like us. Like normal kids. (Jamira)*
*I can’t wait to learn hula. (Alliyanna)*
*I want to make shark tooth jewellery. (Stephanie)*
*They were cool. They were like us. (Shanelle)*

Worawa students were privileged to take part in the WIPCE opening ceremony as part of the Australian contingent. They observed traditional Hawaiian culture, presented gifts to their hosts and took part in formal protocols. As part of the formal program Worawa conducted a workshop which students introduced. Wearing contemporary capes that feature visual narratives designed at Worawa, students introduced themselves and identified their language group, sang the Yorta Yorta song Ngarra Burra Ferra and shared their personal stories. They then travelled to Kamehameha School to participate in the La Opio, Youth Forum. This day focused on Youth and their concerns. Worawa students had an opportunity to be part of a series of workshops with their Sister School counterparts and to see their College and learn some of their cultural practices. Both Sister School partners took part in creating a Youth Statement, which was put into a formal statement for presentation to the United Nations.
Students also spent time together enjoying cultural dances, songs and stories. They found this element of sharing at their sister school very poignant (demonstrated in the girls’ responses and questions):

- *I want to stay here and ask more about it. They have dances for things too. That made me feel at home.* (Shanelle)
- *I wish I knew more about my dances.* (Jamira)
- *I want to know more about where I am from. I will have to ask Nan.* (Kahealea)

Shanelle described the cultural sharing night:

*At this night, people who had heard our stories thought we were really exceptional. I was so proud. There was a lot of dancing and I was scared to join in, but I did and I felt so proud and happy. It was so fun and it made me move my body. I enjoyed every part of it. Beautiful Hawaiian women did dance and sang grooving, popping songs. We danced to that too. I loved it. I made lots of friends.*

Overall the students’ comments leave the impression that the partnership developed during this visit was “a magical experience of synergy that they'll remember all of their lives” (Townsend, 2014, p. 1).

Aunty Lois, in reflecting on the experience in Hawaii commented upon the ability of the girls to make friends and socialise in an unfamiliar atmosphere and the relaxed manner in which they participated in all activities, including her ‘photo shoot’ on Waikiki Beach (https://www.Facebook.com/pages/Worawa-Aboriginal-College-Official-Page/222579758745). Aunty Lois also commented on the rigour they displayed in rising early each day and in assisting her to present a workshop at the conference.
3.7.1.5.2 Visiting New Zealand

The Term 3, 2014 Worawa College Newsletter reported that as part of the College’s ongoing work to develop an International First Nations Education Network, The Executive Director, Aunty Lois Peeler AM, led a group of students and staff on a visit to New Zealand to visit a number of Maori schools.

The group visited a number of Marea (sacred spaces) and had the privileged opportunity to stay at two. The first was Te Poho or Rawiri Marea in Gisborne and the second was Himerupe Marea in Te Araroa. At each the group was greeted with a Powhiri, which formally welcomed them onto the Marea. As part of the welcome ceremony Worawa responded by singing Ngarra Burra Ferra from *The Sapphires*, which was known to all. The girls stayed overnight at both Marea where they formed relationships with the girls in the community. The Maori girls taught the Worawa girls traditional dances and songs using clapsticks and poi whilst the Worawa girls taught Ngarra Burra Ferra in return.

In Gisborne, the group visited Gisborne Girls’ High School a Sports Academy, where they were welcomed with a Haka Powhiri and had the opportunity to play netball against the Year 9 and 10’s team. A highlight was the visit to Toihoukura, Maori Visual Arts and Design for the ‘First Nations’ art exhibition by Worawa and Toihoukura students, where the Deputy Mayor gave a welcoming address. Aunty Lois gave a presentation titled ‘Sharing My Story’ providing insight into the historic and contemporary struggle of Aboriginal Australia.

The Worawa visit attracted the attention of Maori media who sent a television crew to meet the Worawa contingent at Mt Hikurangi. Mt Hikurangi is a spiritual experience with breath-taking scenery. Of particular significance was viewing the installation of carvings erected on the plateau to commemorate the dawning of the new millennium in 2000. The Worawa visit was fully documented and aired on Maori Television and NITV. The College established partner school relations with Te Kura Kaupapa Maori in Gisborne and Te Araroa, immersion schools.

As a follow up to hearing Distinguished Professor Graham Smith speak at Buunji Conference in Sydney, the group visited Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, to learn about this tertiary institute where Distinguished Professor Graham Smith is Vice-Chancellor, Chief Executive Officer. Here Māori knowledge and practices are key components of the academic programs, teaching delivery and student experiences. Programs ensure students have a strong cultural foundation and political literacy on which to build their academic achievement. Of interest is that the focus at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi is not only for students to gain academic credentials, but also to ensure their learning has a tangible, positive outcome for the communities they come from.

The Vice-Chancellor / Chief Executive Officer, Distinguished Professor Graham Smith will be a Keynote Speaker at the Yapaneyerup: ‘Walking Together to Make a Difference’, Indigenous Education Symposium, in Melbourne in July 2015. The word ‘Yapaneyerup’, means coming together in the language of the Yorta Yorta people.
Each of the Worawa students, Katarina, Kahealea, Jaden and Regina agreed that their memories from the Maori people and their culture have left an imprint on their hearts, which will remain with them forever. Photographs of the visit are posted on the Worawa Facebook page https://www.Facebook.com/pages/Worawa-Aboriginal-College-Official-Page/222579758745

Worawa students will no doubt travel again in 2015. This will commence in April, as Alliyanna has been selected to attend the Gallipoli centenary commemoration ceremonies in 2015. The Worawa Newsletter, Term 3, 2014 reports:

On Wednesday, 10 September, Premier Denis Napthine announced the 80 students and 14 teacher chaperones selected from across the state to represent Victoria at the 2015 Anzac Day Gallipoli Tour. Worawa student Alliyanna Tipiloura and staff member Francina Jodhi were indeed privileged to be given the opportunity to spend five days in Turkey representing Victoria at the historic Anzac Day service at Gallipoli.

Link to: Section 3: Literature Review: Partnerships
4. Connected and Empowered Through Rigorous Learning

Students are connected and empowered through rigorous learning within a model of personalised, holistic learning. This education model is grounded in Aboriginal values and ways of knowing, doing and being and includes:

- Aboriginal Culture
- Aboriginal Studies (Time and Place)
- Health
- Wellbeing
- Health and Physical Education
- Pathways to Womanhood
- The Arts
- Language
- Mathematics
- Science
- Technology (integrated across the Curriculum)
- Certificate courses
- Assessment and Curriculum Planning

Such a model responds to the requirements of effective middle schooling and the need, expressed at the beginning of this movement by the Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, (1993), when it said there is a need to “transform traditional approaches that involve students in the ingesting and regurgitating of factual information” (p. 38).

The model enables two-way learning (Hooley, 2009) and also enables personalised learning, which Hargreaves (2006) says develops a transformed learner. For transformation to be achieved, Hargreaves stresses the student must “co-construct with others all aspects of education” (p. 10), as well as discover personal meaning. Development of appropriate curriculum also appreciates the implications for the trajectory of the learner’s life (Duignan & Bezzina, 2004).

4.1 Rigorous Learning

Pride in culture is understood to be foundational to the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and academic learning of students at Worawa. Shannon, a member of the College Board of Directors elaborates on this:

*Pride in being Aboriginal; pride and personal self-worth/self-esteem. Respect of differences, cultural and personal.*

Gary, an former member of the College Board of Directors also understands happiness to be fundamental for successful educational outcomes.

Both respondents agreed that the integration of wellbeing and academic programs to be very important as health and wellbeing underpin performance. This is
compounded at Worawa because so many students experience trauma in their lives, both personal and inter-generational. Shannon notes:

Supporting both the wellbeing and academic learning is a model that should be employed by all schools, and one that Worawa does adopt is constantly improving upon.

Strategies the College utilises to recognise a student’s ‘First Nations’ learning, in order to develop approaches for learning in the western scientific culture are expressed succinctly by Gary:

Learning that is contextualised: The western scientific method is directed at breaking up an object to its component parts and application or synthesis is viewed as reconstruction of the object or an innovation to its use. Learning which enables interaction with the object rather than its component parts in isolation, is a stronger pedagogical approach.

This statement reflects Mahmoudi et al., (2012), when they note that holistic education has always been a hallmark of Indigenous culture as the Indigenous person sees the earth and the universe as infused with meaning and integral to the meaning of their lives as an interconnected whole. The statement also reflects the challenge Indigenous people face when walking in two worlds; they are in the “contested space between two knowledge systems” (Nakata, 2007, p. 9). Nakata (2003) also notes that an appropriate model of schooling is required to support appropriate ways of learning for Indigenous students, as while Indigenous ways of knowing must be included in any pedagogical approach for Indigenous students, these students also need to become proficient in mainstream ways of knowing. As life experience and not academic excellence alone is the concern of holistic education (Hare, 2010), the curriculum in such a setting goes far beyond the acquisition of basic skills and is developed within a broad vision (Mahmoudi et al., 2011).

Gary also says that:

personalised and multi-layered learning opportunities, which recognise and build upon the strengths of the learner whilst supporting their contextualised engagement with those parts of knowledge and skills needing improvement enable the monitoring of student growth as a learner, at Worawa.

4.1.1 Definitions of Learning

As noted by Hamilton (2005), competing theories of learning often co-exist within the schools, so it is not surprising that teachers at Worawa exhibited differences when asked to define ‘learning’.

Learning was initially defined by most of the teachers in terms of rational thinking. Most said they had to think about this for some time in order to construct a
definition. The acquisition of new knowledge and understanding, the mastery of a concept as well as the development of skills and strategies to gain new knowledge and create capacity were identified as key aspects of learning. Transference of skills to other areas of learning or to home, where the implementation of skills impact on students’ lives and the lives of others were also cited as aspects of learning. Some teachers understood skill acquisition to be broader than rational thinking and included manual skills in their definition. The development of life skills was also mentioned. These definitions are consistent with Purdie and Hattie’s (2002) understanding that in Western societies definitions of learning are usually limited to rational thinking and involve an increase in knowledge, memorisation, acquisition of facts, practical procedures, abstraction of meaning and interpretive processes (Purdie & Hattie, 2002).

The study undertaken by Purdie and Hattie (op.cit) added personal change, a process not bound by time or place and the development of social competence to the above categories. Learning as a process of change that moved beyond rational thinking was mentioned by Leigh when she said learning is:

“little ah ha moments” that change you or your beliefs about yourself or the world.”

and by Christine when she said learning is:

change which involves a process- intellectual change is a part of this.

In the course of this discussion with the teachers, the interviewers heard them deliver a more comprehensive understanding of learning and admit they were only focussing on intellectual learning, when they formulated their definitions. These more comprehensive definitions include that learning is “an everyday thing”, involving “all aspects of your personality” and that social and emotional learning provide a sound base for intellectual learning. This understanding is congruent with their convictions that wellbeing precedes intellectual learning. In other sections of their interviews they have expressed this, as a sound understanding the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (Maslow, 1943). Respect is linked to learning in the context of the College when Sinead says:

Learning to respect others and yourself is huge at Worawa.

As discussion of learning continued, the teachers revealed that their understanding of learning is closer to an enactivist understanding, in which learning is:

a complex co-emergent process of holistic development enabled through the construction of meaning, taking place within a community that is dynamic and robust in adapting to changing circumstances. (Hamilton, 2005)
4.1.1.1 Student perspective

The students readily discuss Rigour, one of the ‘4R’s’ and relate this concept to their learning. Rigour, according to Andrea is:

*to keep going when the times are tough*

Sasha says it is to:

*Keep trying; never give up.*

All students identify factors that assist them to learn well. These include small classes where students have more ‘one on one’ time with the teachers. Jamira says:

*At my last school there were just too many kids.*

She also notes that supportive students assist too, when:

*the people in the classroom encourage you and wanted to learn as well.*

She adds:

*In my last school there were the kids who wanted to learn and other disruptive kids who did not care. I was sort of a disruptive kid.*

If Jamira receives “negative vibes” from another student she tries to work through these. She describes such a situation and says:

*We still focus, both of us and we are still both learning. We take no notice of each other in classroom.*

All the girls understand responsibility for their own learning is demonstrated by following rules, being present at classes every day and arriving on time. Jamira notes ultimate personal responsibility:

*There are people to help you and guide you but it’s all up to you. At the end of the day, you are the person who’s going to make it work.*

Andrea adds:

*If I don’t get support I just push myself.*

Rigour and responsibility are also related to respect when Jamira says:

*You don’t want to be disrespectful by not going to class or else you are not going to absorb what the teachers have to offer.*

Most helpful to her learning is:

*Being able to sit down and get my head into my work without*
any distractions.

Assistance from teachers extends beyond specific questions in the classroom, to Jaden’s understanding that learning is assisted because:

Everything is so focused on school. The whole environment; you just want the best for us. We all just have one goal.

Regina who had great difficulty concentrating when she first came to Worawa, says Rigour means a great deal to her in the classroom and in sports’ teams. To learn you have to:

Listen to the teacher and just do your work. Just concentrate.

Learning ceases for her by:

Playing round with other students; all them other students stop me concentrating properly.

Jamira and Andrea, who went to Hawaii, describe this as time when learning was fun. Jamira says:

I learned heaps. There was so much overwhelming in my head. That week seemed like months and months and by the time we got back it felt like one day. Me and Rani were having a conversation and she said, “I can’t explain it to anybody”, and I said I felt the same way.

Andrea said:

The sister schools, learning about their culture was really fun. We shared some of our stuff with them and we bonded really well. They did the hula and some songs like we say our school poem.

Choice is associated with learning being ‘fun’ and also with the concept of ‘free time’. The choices, which Regina regards as taking place in ‘free’ time, include, activities in Mathletics, reading a book or asking the teacher for other work. Sport is also fun for her, because it involves working with friends.

Fun is understood to be significant in middle years’ approaches to curriculum development (Brown, 2001). Hamilton (2005) comments that students understand fun as occurring in learning situations they enjoy, because they feel they are achieving. She maintains that achievement is enhanced by the relaxation that enjoyment engenders and ‘fun’ is inextricably entwined with achievement, relevance and control over learning.
4.2 Rigorous Learning in the Boarding Houses

Three broad categories are defined that elicit and foster resiliency in children. They are:

1. Caring relationships,
2. High expectation messages,
3. Opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution.

These three categories are evident in discussions with the staff members of the Boarding Houses.

4.2.1 Perspectives of Staff Members

All interviewees stressed the importance of consistency of approach. They know the girls are learning,

when they do things without being asked.

This was particularly noticeable when one house parent was away and the students cleaned the house without being prompted or supervised by anyone. Lyn describes her role in maintaining consistency.

I show them consistency from me. When they first come they do a fashion with their bed and then take off down to the basketball court. I go and get them and bring them back. I only have to do that two or three times.

Kim notes that persistence assists and says:

The house parents are patient with the girls and privileges and consequences follow.

Persistence and consistency are linked to routine when Francine says:

Routine is the easiest. If there is a routine it makes it much easier for them to settle in.

Routine involves daily and bedtime routines that house parents and students follow. Each house maintains the same bedtime across the entire week and the same rising time except for an 8 am sleep in on weekends. Television is not available after a particular time and quiet time and use of low lighting is encouraged as bedtime approaches, as well as the routine of putting on pyjamas and brushing teeth. Routine is also evident in methods used to assist students to go to sleep. These include saying prayers with the students, reading to them or singing to them at bedtime.

Sammy understands the girls learn broadly as they
develop skills of socialisation, language, independence and money skills.

The girls face similar challenges to those of any teenager when they are asked to do something and they do not wish to comply. When talking of particular challenges the girls face, Kim says,

*Trusting each other can be difficult for the girls when they arrive, as many come from speaking different languages at home and some have learning or mental health difficulties or other needs. If they hear others talking and giggling and they don’t understand, they assume it is directed at them.*

When she observes students behaving in a manner similar to one they have described as confronting, when exhibited at home in their communities, she reminds them of their responsibility and power:

*That might be the way things are done in your community but if you want your community to change, you have to be the one to change the community; and to do this you have to change.*

Sammy attributes the success of the Worawa students to the ‘4R’s’ when she says:

*The ‘4 Rs’ are the main focus. One of the best things about here is to see the girls come in without the ability to recognise their strengths but to walk out with all the skills to go out into the big world.*

### 4.2.2 Perspectives of Students

All students speak of the learning how to complete their chores, make their beds, do their homework, adhere to routines and be organised, as important learning in the boarding house. They also acknowledge the relevance of this learning beyond their days at Worawa. Jamira also values learning associated with the available sporting options: netball, soccer and basketball.

Respect is associated with learning when Maxine says:

*We learn to respect each other; not to enter another person’s room without asking their permission.*

Jamira likens living in the boarding house to living in a family, where respect is due:

*because it is like a real house, a real family.*

Andrea notes the development of interpersonal skills such as interacting with each other and teamwork, as important skills learned in the boarding house. She says it is important not to:
put someone else down to make yourself feel better.

**Link to:** Section 3: Literature review: Rigour in Education

### 4.3 Worawa Education Model

Worawa website describes the College:

*Worawa is a boarding school for young Aboriginal women in the middle years of schooling (years 7 – 10). The Worawa Education Program is based on the concept of “two-way” learning. The Teaching and Learning Program addresses the key learning areas of mainstream curriculum (Australian Curriculum) and takes into account Aboriginal culture, values, spiritual beliefs and learning styles.*


*In this, the first Aboriginal school in Victoria, the educational curriculum has been specifically designed to suit Aboriginal students to bring them to their full potential...Aboriginal culture will be imparted (along with formal studies) not only as a school subject in each class’s timetable, but as an integral part of the everyday life at the School*  

The original College patron Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls emphasised the importance of learning Aboriginal culture and history at Worawa:

*Aboriginal children must be educated in the way of our people. They must learn their history, about their great ancestors, the language and the law. It’s time for them to know and understand themselves. They must also be educated in the ways of the society in which they live, in the very best of what it has to offer, so they can truly be a part, not only of Australia’s past, but also its present and future. The education of Aboriginal people is one of the biggest challenges facing Australia today.*  
(Speech at the opening of Worawa Aboriginal College, 1983).

Worawa recognises both Western and Indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives and incorporates these into the curriculum, extra-curricular, cultural and community activities.

The ‘Worawa Cultural Connections’ curriculum model visualises the central place of Aboriginal culture in each of the College's five Learning Centres, and the many cultural expressions. The Dalton Curriculum Model (Parkhurst, 1922) informs the Worawa Model of Learning. This model facilitates independent thinking and the development of research skills and creativity. Personalised instruction considers a student’s prior learning and the pace at which she can progress (Parkhurst, *ibid*). The
importance of discipline/subject knowledge and expertise is foundational to the
teachers capacity to provide Personalised Learning, consisting of learning activities
which are tailored to the needs of each individual student and are designed to challenge and extend student’s knowledge, skills and understandings. This is congruent with Vygotsky’s (1973) Zone of Proximal Development.

Figure 5.2: Worawa Cultural Connections

The Worawa Education Model has a distinctive and unique profile based on an integrated Education, Culture, Wellbeing model that embraces the concept of “two-way” learning. This involves the Learning and Teaching Program addressing the Key Learning Areas of mainstream curriculum whilst taking into account Aboriginal culture, values, spiritual beliefs and learning styles. The components of the Worawa model are:

- educational and cultural programs based on individual pathways, which are designed to develop and challenge the capabilities of each girl and to provide opportunities to develop girls’ talents in the creative and performing arts, in sport, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and in other pursuits for which aptitude and interest have been identified.

- high quality residential care provides a caring, pleasant environment and healthy nutrition, combined with supportive supervision and counselling, recreational and sporting activities on site and ‘away’, participation in the development of the Worawa school community and its environment, participation in the life of the local and wider community and joint activities with compatible organisations, schools and clubs.
• supervised homework and organised extra curricular activities.

The College has also developed Cultural Standards for both students and staff (Appendix 6).

4.3.1 Worawa Learning and Teaching Structure

The Worawa Aboriginal College learning and teaching program has been designed to educate the whole person across all domains of their development, social, emotional, physical, spiritual, cultural and cognitive or academic.

At Worawa the curriculum is organised in Learning Centres, each Centre having dedicated teachers and a designated learning space. Each Worawa girl, when she enters the College, following initial base-line data assessments made by staff, develops learning goals in each subject. As a result of these assessments and goals, each girl experiences Personalised Learning, which is a means to track and reinforce individual growth and development. Individual digital portfolios is one element of a comprehensive student progress and participation record, established against a range of educational and social criteria, utilised to monitor and assist student progress.

The Australian Curriculum frames the Worawa College Learning Centre Programs. The College curriculum plan calls for Learning Centres for Languages, Mathematics, Science and Environment, The Arts, Culture, Pathways and Health and Physical Education. Information Technology is available across all Learning Areas and the focus of specific projects. The curriculum design is on a four-year cycle. This enables the following features:

1. Suitability for Personalised Learning Programs
2. Coverage of all curriculum areas for a given student
3. Flexibility of timetabling in response to different possible enrolment patterns
4. Accommodation of students who enter part way through a term or year.

The Worawa curriculum strongly emphasises foundation studies in literacy and numeracy while providing a breadth and depth of learning experiences across all Learning Areas. The College is very aware of the need to plan and provide rich, varied transitional pathways for girls once they complete Year 10. The focus is to build the self esteem of the students, so that they have the personal confidence, motivation and discipline, the organisational skills, the academic skills and the practical skills to be successful in pursuing VCE, and, or VET or VCAL in mainstream educational settings. Worawa helps to prepare young women for the social and work contexts that they will face when they leave school.

The Worawa Learning Centre curriculum has been designed to build and enhance individual student learning outcomes by:
• recognising different knowledge systems, First Nations and Western Scientific
• recognising student prior learning within Culture
• building core skills, knowledge and understanding
• emphasising respect, relationships, responsibility and rigour
• providing greater autonomy in learning particularly through Personalised Learning (PL)
• improving problem solving skills through collaborative learning tasks and in the completion of independent challenges
• developing creativity and self expression
• fostering self-confidence in contributing to discussion and group work
• encouraging goal setting
• making vocational and tertiary links.

The College theme Cultural Connections and the associated term themes provide links between Learning Centre activities. Each term, within each Learning Centre, students are provided with a challenging and stimulating unit of work, which is designed to deliver essential standards, as outlined in the Australian Curriculum. The Worawa Academic Reference Group (WARG) monitors the curriculum and the staff team makes timely adjustments.

The Worawa Academic Advisory Group (WARG) was constituted in 2008 to provide advice to the Worawa Aboriginal College Board of Directors, in the development of the Worawa Learning and Teaching Model and Program. WARG meets regularly and is provided with briefings from the Executive Director and Head of Learning and Teaching. All members of the WARG have experience in Indigenous education, as well as undergraduate and, or post-graduate university teaching experience. Their experience is across seven Victorian universities. Some members hold research and teaching positions in universities, others provide education consultancy to the secondary sector. WARG, in conjunction with the Executive Director auspices research projects to both validate and challenge the Worawa Model.

4.3.1.1 Curriculum Framework

Central to all learning and teaching undertaken at the College is the Worawa Way (page 6). The Aboriginal Values of Respect, Relationships, Responsibility and Rigour underpin the essence of how students and teachers relate to each other and how they view learning and teaching at Worawa.

The Worawa Education Model demonstrates the relationship between the component parts of the Learning and Teaching program. The College community has developed policies for all key functions of the College. These policies provide a set of shared beliefs and understanding about the purpose and goals of the College and the implementation strategies to be undertaken by staff to achieve these. All policies are reviewed on a cyclical base within the strategic plan of the College Board of Directors. (Learning and Teaching Policy, Appendix 7). Policies are supported by documented approaches to the teaching of Literacy and Numeracy (Appendices 36 & 37).

The College Curriculum is based in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA). The Worawa Scope and Sequence documents provide a comprehensive overview of
Learning Area Achievement Standards and outlines essential knowledge, skills and understandings. To complement the Scope and Sequence, the College has available a number of Whole School Teacher Assessment Rubrics, which provide a comprehensive overview of targeted skills, understandings and teaching points. The Assessment Rubrics are a key tool to be utilised by staff to assess students and to assist them to develop an understanding of their learning and thereby to take ownership of their learning. Rubrics affirm a student’s existing knowledge while providing a challenge for future learning. When staff members utilise appropriate assessment rubrics, assessment For, As and Of learning is enabled (Earl, 2003).

(English Persuasive Writing Whole School Teacher Rubric: Appendix 8).

4.3.1.1.1 Units Of Work

Within the framework of the College theme and term themes and founded in the College Scope and Sequence and Assessment procedures, term units of work have been developed for each learning centre. Units of work have been designed to ensure that students are provided with both breadth and depth of learning and a comprehensive and rigorous Middle Years education. A four – year plan of sixteen units, per Learning Centre, provides the foundation of the Learning and Teaching program (Appendix 34). Teachers, working together in a Professional Learning Team (PLT), review the appropriateness of the units for the particular cohort and when required, adapt or change. All units of work are developed within a planning template, which clearly outlines:

- Content (including incorporation of/reference to Aboriginal place, time and story)
- Targeted standards (assessment rubric)
- “I can” statements (aligned to the content standards/assessment rubric)
- Learning Activities incorporating:
  Explore/Investigate
  Design/Plan
  Produce
  Evaluate.

For all units of work, teachers incorporate appropriate assessment strategies, including project work, tests and products such as painting/film (Example English Unit, Appendix 9).

4.3.1.1.2 Assessment: Monitoring Student Progress

When a student enrolls at Worawa she undergoes diagnostic assessment to ascertain her achievement level and to inform staff about appropriate challenges to be set within group work and, or personalised learning. This Baseline Data continues to be collected throughout the year and is entered in the College ‘T’ Drive. This process ensures that a comprehensive set of data informs program design and implementation and maintains quality records thus enabling the College to demonstrate the difference it makes, over time, to the learning of the students (English summary of baseline data, Appendix 10).
Recognising that many students on entry to the College, due to family and or community circumstances, may have low achievement levels within mainstream education settings, teachers develop differentiation strategies, to cater for individual needs. Utilising baseline data and assessment rubrics and informed by the Worawa Way teachers develop personalised learning strategies when appropriate.

All Learning Centres have developed a data collection and assessment schedule for each subject area, ensuring that teachers:

- know where students are ‘at’ at the beginning of the year/unit of work
- can plan for students’ learning
- can determine when/if students have learned what was planned
- can look towards ‘what next’ for student learning

(English Learning Centre data collection schedule, Appendix 11).

4.3.1.1.2.1 NAPLAN 2013

With the support of Rosalyn Muir in her last months at Independent Schools Victoria before the Smarter Schools National Partnership (SSNP) program funding ceased, Worawa analysed their NAPLAN 2013 data. Twenty-four students participated in the testing, many of whom, had just begun at Worawa at the beginning of that year.

Aunty Lois’s inspirational speech at the beginning of the 3 days, assisted their determination & rigour in completing the tests. She said

“Aboriginal people have fought for a long time for the right to participate in mainstream education, and when I was your age, my people were not accepted in mainstream schools. Now that we have that right, we have to take every advantage to do our best and show everyone what we are capable of doing.”

As the data shows, the Worawa students are well below State and National Mean scores. However, if the 5-year trend data (Annual Report, Appendix 12) is analysed, they are seen to be ‘closing the gap’ in Reading, Writing and Spelling. Although there are fewer students, 19 in total, enrolled for NAPLAN in 2014, teachers hope their consistent work in Maths and English in particular, coupled with their first-language literacy intervention strategies, will enable the continuation of an upward trend.

While Worawa College students participate in NAPLAN testing and the College recognises the value of data which enables students, families and schools to gauge learning progress, some members of the Worawa community are concerned that the tests have a cultural bias for students who do not come from a culture founded in western scientific learning and therefore these tests do not allow them to demonstrate their first culture learning and knowledge.
4.3.1.3 Recording and Reporting

Worawa students maintain a record of their Learning Journey in a Digital Portfolio (DP) developed in a Word file (Sample Entries, Appendix 13). This Digital Portfolio commences when a student enters the College. Students record an overview of their background and list their goals, both personal and academic. A folder is maintained for each Learning Centre and students record WHAT content and key skills they are studying, WHY they are undertaking this study, HOW they are engaging in interesting and challenging learning activities in relation to process and product and NOW WHAT they will “do” with this learning in order to progress to the next stage in their learning. This digital record enables the student to see their progress and provides them with an ownership of their learning. At the conclusion of each year a student prepares a power point presentation, summarising the contents of their Digital Portfolio and other work and assessment tasks. This is included with the student’s written report to family and guardians. This power point is also used for parent, student and teacher interviews in the final week of the College year.

Students are kept informed of the progress they have made and the learning challenges they face. All teacher assessment data is stored in the ‘T’ file and provide the basis for report writing (Appendices 14 & 15). The recording of the student’s Learning Journey on their Digital Portfolio is also utilised in report writing. Detailed reports are sent to families at the conclusion of semesters two and four and interim reports are sent at the conclusion of terms one and three.

A Family and Community Forum is conducted annually. This provides parents, carers and Elders the opportunity to learn about the school’s operation and to provide the College with feedback and suggestions for future activities and strategies (Report of Community Forum 2014, Appendix 16).

4.3.1.2 In Summary

The Worawa Education Model is holistic and so life experience and not academic excellence alone is the focus of learning. The curriculum goes far beyond the acquisition of basic skills and is developed within a broad vision and counteracts the mainstream education systems in Australia, that have “an obsessive focus on standards and testing” and so reflect, “a materialist and consumerist culture” (Mahmoudi et al., 2011 p. 179). Thus the Worawa model understands education as a preparation for life in all its dimensions.

The College provides an innovative approach to the delivery of education to Indigenous girls. With a relatively small student cohort, a low student-teacher ratio and a commitment to personalised learning in a boarding school environment, where high levels of supervision and encouragement are provided, Worawa can provide new opportunities for educational success and build students’ confidence, skills and understandings to shape learning pathways for themselves beyond secondary school.

As a result of this innovative approach Worawa staff members have observed a number of changes in their students. These include improved:
• concentration
• ability to self manage and soothe emotions
• consistency
• appreciation of boundaries and routine
• physical health
• self esteem
• resilience
• pride in personal care
• social skills
• literacy and enjoyment of reading
• leadership skills
• cultural pride

Link to: Section 6: Findings and Discussion: Enabling Factor 4.15
Key Enabling Factor Four
Section 3: Literature Review: Designing Curriculum
Empowering Education
Enactivism, a Biological Theory of Cognition
Gifted Indigenous Students
Holistic Learning
Appendices 2, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 23, 34, 35, & 36

4.3.2 Professional Learning Community

It is widely understood that effective professional learning teams allow teachers to collaboratively explore pedagogical approaches, continuously refine these and make the connections between curriculum areas in order to improve student learning outcomes (Palmer, 1998; Marsh, 2001; Murdoch & Hornsby, 1997; Murdoch, 1998, Hamilton, 2005; Gilbert 2012; DuFour, 2014).

4.3.2.1 A Focus upon Learning and Teaching: Continuous Improvement

In 2013 the focus for the Academic Program at Worawa was the improvement of structures, processes and the building of consistent routines. Significant progress has been made in this regard, with student engagement and behaviour management showing significant improvement.

The weekly staff meeting addresses one of the staff’s improvement foci, determined from the yearly learning & teaching review at the end of the previous year. This is revisited the following term to determine progress.

The improvement focus and consequent strategies for 2014 were outlined by Kathryn, Head of Learning and Teaching and discussed with staff members at the beginning of the new academic year. A core belief and inquiry question around these foci were addressed each week at staff meetings. This approach has been productive and staff members have taken turns to share the leadership of staff meetings each week (Staff Meeting Schedule, Appendix 16). This approach is consistent with
Dufour’s (2014) understanding that effective professional learning is ongoing and job-embedded and results-oriented (Staff Meeting Schedule, Learning and Teaching Improvement Plan and Schedule & Staff meeting Minutes, Appendices 17, 18 & 19).

4.3.2.2 Professional Learning Teams and Curriculum Planning

All teachers work together as part of a teaching Professional Learning Community (PLC), meeting as a Professional Learning team (PLT) every morning from 8.30 – 9.00. The purpose of this meeting is to be up-dated on student wellbeing, daily events and learning expectations. They also meet for a staff meeting once a week, at 8.00am on Wednesday, where the emphasis is on student learning and teaching improvement.

An annual Learning and Teaching Improvement Plan is developed and this provides a framework/approach for all Learning Centres (Learning and Teaching Improvement Plan, Appendix17). Each Learning Centre PLT also meets once a week, during a scheduled time, to discuss student data, progress, curriculum and programs. They moderate assessments and support each other to develop strategies to differentiate and personalise the curriculum.

An evaluation of learning in the PLT demonstrates teacher understanding of their learning. Teachers responded to three questions: What did you do well? What did you learn that could help you improve? Where do you suggest you go next?

What did you do well? In response to this question teachers expressed learning relating to their particular learning area, for example:

Starting to map out curriculum in mathematics

Started to align partnerships to service – Careers and Work Experience Placement Program

What did you learn that could help you improve? In response to this question, teachers expressed their appreciation of discussion of approaches in Learning Areas other than their own, for example:

*more about what others are doing in their learning areas*

*about other learning areas in the school and their methods with students; skills/ application*

*discussing different PLT areas in staff meetings and all of us working to a more whole school approach, a more integrated approach.*

For one teacher, it was:

*Using data in the classroom;*

*Learning about different ways of presenting data and*

*Making it more usable, for just me and my students.*
Where do you suggest you go next? In response to this question, some teachers wish to continue the exploration of cross-curricula links and working towards a more whole school integrated approach, while others wish to continue their personal professional learning pathway.

The continuation of this approach will enable the teachers “to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subject and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (Palmer, 1998, p. 11).

4.3.2.3 Yarning Up on Trauma

The College recognises the need for a coherent mechanism for staff to be supported to work with young people who have experienced trauma and has placed emphasis on professional development and support for staff. The College initiated a series of seminars to provide culturally safe training for staff to enhance their skills and knowledge in dealing with traumatised Aboriginal girls. Aboriginal mental health professionals were engaged to deliver workshops designed for and by Aboriginal people. All Worawa staff members undertake ‘Yarning up on Trauma’ a Certificate Course delivered by an Indigenous family therapist from Berry Street Family Services.

‘Yarning Up on Trauma’ (Literature Review: Section 2.3.1.1 & Appendix 20) was originally designed to assist workers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community organisations, which work with vulnerable children and families throughout Victoria to understand historical and present day trauma. It assists those workers to recognise and deal with traumas of their own, as well as those of the children and families they work with. As the program also aims to assist others working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and Communities, it is relevant for Worawa staff members as they attempt to understand trauma and attachment disruption from a cultural perspective. Staff members who have undertaken this professional learning speak highly of its benefits.

4.3.2.4 Stronger Smarter On-line Professional Learning

The Australian Institute of Teaching funded the ‘Stronger Smarter On-line Project’. The ‘Stronger Smarter’ meta-strategies enable participants to examine critical elements of practice in schools working to make a difference in Indigenous education. The Module encourages participants to reflect on their capacity to make a difference, and explores ways to enhance educational outcomes for Indigenous students by reflecting on participants’ own capacity and beliefs, building evidence of their learning journey by recording thoughts and reflections and taking action on their own ‘Stronger Smarter’ journey. All academic staff members undertook this on-line professional learning in 2013.
4.3.2.5 Mindfulness Meditation

In 2012 Philippa Ransome conducted sessions for the training of the boarding staff in ‘Mindfulness Meditation’ (Literature Review: Section 2.3.1.2). The sessions for training the mind included sitting, standing and walking relaxation, mindfulness of sound, body, food, present experience, 3 minute breathing space, feelings, moods and mind-states, thoughts, calm quiet time, walking quiet time, sweeping quiet time, breath quiet time and loving kindness quiet time. The sessions for ‘Heart Happy Living’ include:

- guidelines for heart-happy living,
- wholesomeness and unwholesomeness,
- five helpful emotions,
- four helpful efforts,
- swapping thoughts,
- evaluating,
- letting go,
- investigation,
- contemplation and
- contemplation after calm quiet time.

As recorded elsewhere in this Section, the boarding house staff members valued these sessions and use some of these approaches with the girls.

4.3.2.6 Resilience Training

In 2014 Leonie Abbott presented a session on ‘Character Strengths and Virtues’ to the staff at Worawa. Using the strengths identified by Peterson & Seligman (2004) (Appendix 21), Leonie led staff members to reflect on and identify their perceived signature strengths and assist other staff members in the identification of theirs. They also discussed fixed and growth mindsets and active, constructive responding. From this a school plan to focus on aspects of character strengths was developed:

- Term 2: Appreciation of beauty; Kindness; Humour; Enthusiasm;
- Term 3: Friendship; Teamwork; Creativity; Persistence;
- Term 4: Spirituality; Leadership; Gratitude; Hope (Resiliency).

Each of the signature strengths was the focus for two weeks, with the teachers and house parents running a joint session each Tuesday afternoon from 4 to 4-30pm. Each house prepared a plan for their week and the session concluded with a meditation conducted by the house parent. The weekly focus was also discussed at Assembly. Students were observed by the house parents and awarded merit points for the demonstration of these strengths at various times during the week.

In a discussion about professional learning in wellbeing programs, all teachers said they particularly valued first – aid training. They find the learning from this training practical and very useful. Because of the high turnover of staff, only one teacher had been at the College for all professional learning in wellbeing programs. These include ‘Yarning Up On Trauma’ (Appendix 20), ‘Restorative Practice’ (Staff
Workshop, Appendix 22 & Literature Review: Section 2.8.1), ‘Non-violent Crisis Intervention’ and ‘Resiliency’. There is however, evidence of effective use of the learning from these programs being used in targeted approaches across the College community. This evidence is available in other segments of this Section.

4.3.3 Staff Appraisal

All Worawa academic staff members participate in the Worawa Staff Appraisal Program. This program is based in the Worawa Values and Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards and provides staff with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and evaluate their progress as a professional educator (Reflective Proforma: Appendix 23). They work with the Head of Learning and Teaching and the Executive Director of the College to set annual goals. They work with the executive team to develop a personal professional learning plan, which is supported by the College.

Link to: Section 3: Literature Review: Connectedness within a Learning Community, & Professional Learning Theory and Programs
Section 8: Appendices: 6, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22 & 23

4.4 Rigour in Learning Centres

The following sections demonstrate that learning in all programs at Worawa is built on caring relationships, high expectations for the students as well as opportunities for participation; these are the three categories that define and elicit resiliency (Bernard, 1991; 1997; Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993; Henderson, 2013). Also nurtured in these programs, is the ability to engage in a ‘productive’ struggle’. Allen, (2012) describes a ‘productive’ and a ‘destructive’ struggle. A destructive struggle is one that “leads to frustration, makes learning goals seem hazy, feels fruitless, leaves students feeling abandoned and on their own and creates a sense of inadequacy” (p. 3). Conversely, productive struggle “leads to understanding, makes learning goals feel attainable and effort seem worthwhile, yields results, leads students to feelings of empowerment and creates a sense of hope” (p. 3). Constant engagement in a ‘productive struggle’ develops ‘Autonomy’, a trait of a resilient person (Bernard, 1991), exhibited through increasing:

- Sense of identity,
- Self-efficacy,
- Self awareness,
- Task mastery,
- Adaptive distancing from negative messages and conditions.

The descriptions and quotations in the following sections, demonstrate the girls:

- Increasing pride in their Aboriginal identity
- Ability to achieve goals
• Increasing understanding and articulation of who they are
• Ability to complete rigorous tasks
• Positive attitude to life
• Ability to learn and enjoy learning
• Increasing ability to walk in two worlds
• Ability to achieve, through a productive struggle, engendering feelings of empowerment and hope
• Ability to express hope for their futures.

The next section describes ‘Culture Curriculum, including Aboriginal Studies. The order of the sections following this, reflects the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (Maslow, 1943).

1. Physiological
2. Safety
3. Love: affection and belongingness
4. Esteem
5. Self-actualisation.

Even though no learning area aligns discretely with any one stage of the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ and all range explicitly across more than one stage, this is nevertheless a useful organisational tool.

4.4.1 Culture Curriculum

Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls (1983 op cit) spoke of the need for Aboriginal students to be sustained and advanced in both ancient and contemporary cultures. He said:

_Aboriginal children must be educated in the way of our people. They must learn their history, about their great ancestors, the language and the law. It’s time for them to know and understand themselves. They must also be educated in the ways of the society in which they live, in the very best of what it has to offer, so they can truly be part, not only of Australia’s past, but also its present and future”._
Students at Worawa Aboriginal College have formal classes in culture, throughout the year, from a Yorta Yorta Elder, Aunty Zeta Thomson (see pages 9-10). There is the understanding that new information is always being developed and absorbed into cultural knowledge, in order that Indigenous knowledge is not static (Andrews 2006). In enactivist terms culture is not “a representation of the world “out there,” but rather an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself” (Maturana & Varela, 1992, p. 11); knowing rather than knowledge is emphasised and there is the understanding that “we only have the world we bring forth with others, and only love helps us bring it forth” (p. 248). By nurturing and celebrating Culture, Worawa community lives with an enactivist understanding.

The Cultural Curriculum is divided into five units, each with a focus. The Learning Focus of Unit 1 is:

Identifying, affirming and acknowledging each student as a part of their own unique cultural group and developing a sense of connection with other groups throughout Australia.

In this unit students explore answers to key questions concerning their Aboriginality, their connection to the land, their belief systems, their caring for country and their personal identity.

The Learning Focus of Unit 2 is:

Connecting students with an Australian Aboriginal history that unites all groups and empowers them for their future.

The unit explores evidence of 40,000 years of heritage, contained in stories, paintings, traditions and ceremonies. White settlement and the effect of this on Aboriginal people, incorporates a study of Aboriginal Missions and Reserves and enables the students to discover the history of Coranderrk, the land on which the College is situated. In this unit students also study The Stolen Generations and Aboriginal activism. This is particularly significant for the students. Jamira, demonstrates this in her interview, when she says she learned:

That so many Indigenous people had to fight for their rights and we have come a long way from how it used to be to what it is now and there are a lot of significant, important people that have helped change and shape our people.

Sasha says:

We learn about Aboriginal studies, land rights and important Aboriginal people.

Jaden says:

I didn’t know about Aboriginal activists and how hard it was for our people.
The Learning Focus of Unit 3 is:

_Nurturing students’ culture and pride in their identity, fostering their ability to participate in any cultural environment._

Stories of survival and Aboriginal leadership, past and present form the nucleus of this unit. The focus then broadens to nurturing identity and pride in culture through traditional and where appropriate, contemporary language, performing arts, stories, dance, sport, cultural knowledge and environment and ways in which Aboriginal people contribute to the development of society.

The Learning Focus of Unit 4 is:

_Acknowledging and affirming students’ many cultural identities and values & then providing opportunities for them to demonstrate and celebrate these identities and values._

In this unit students affirm, demonstrate and celebrate culture, through:

- Language
- Dreaming
- Clans & Kinship
- Visual & Performing Arts
- Ceremony
- Caring for Country
- Writing
- Celebrations.

The Learning Focus of Unit 5 is:

_Acknowledging and valuing the language strengths of some students, and facilitating the reclamation of heritage languages of others._

This class is delivered in weekly ‘Aboriginal Languages’ classes and explore strong languages, heritage languages and endangered languages

**Link to:** Section 3: Literature Review: Empowerment and Connectedness  
Section 8: Appendix 6
4.4.2 Health and Wellbeing

The home page of Worawa Aboriginal College in describing their focus on Wellbeing, states:
*The support needs of students who present at Worawa are varied and intense; and must be met if the impacts of their experiences and trauma are not to flow throughout their lives.*

*The College has established a Mental Health and Wellbeing Reference Group comprised of health specialists who provide advice to the Worawa Board in the development of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Reference Group will guide the development of policy and practice to ensure coordination and continuity of care to meet the needs of students and support the work of Worawa staff.*

Services available to the students include:

- Two female doctors who visit on alternate weeks from Valley Primary Health Care
- After hours clinic in Healesville
- College Wellbeing Coordinator
- Eastern Health Community Services outreach dental van that visits the school
- Australian College of Optometry conducts an outreach program to the school and facilitates access to glasses
- Eye and Ear Hospital provides an outreach program to the school
- Yarra Ranges Immunisation program visits the school, identifies each student’s immunization needs
- Educational Psychologist
- Visiting Chiropractor who specializes in mind, body and spirit connection
- Department of Health: Wellbeing support
- National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program
- Peninsula Meditation and Mindfulness.

There is a coordinated approach at Worawa, through a Case Management Team consisting of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Wellbeing Coordinator, Nurse, Psychologist, Mental Health Nurse, Head of the Residential Program, Fitness Coordinator and external professional, Cheryl Ritter for Eastern Region Health Services.

4.4.2.1 Nutrition

Worawa Aboriginal College recognises the importance of a healthy diet. Items such as, junk food, lollies or soft drinks are limited to weekends and students are guided with moderation in regard to buying and consuming these foods.

The meal structure ensures that the bulk of a student’s intake of carbohydrates occurs in the earlier part of the day. The ‘Worawa Healthy Eating Plan’ was developed in partnership with the Deakin University, Centre for Health through Action on Social Exclusion (CHASE), School of Health and Social Development.
Breakfast, served at 7.30, consists of milk and juice, two serves of carbohydrates and one serve of protein. The girls’ sugar intake for the day is limited to one level tablespoon of brown sugar on porridge and a trickle of honey on toast. Morning tea, served at 11 am, varies according to the time of year. One serve of carbohydrates is offered at this time. Lunch at 1 pm consists of one serve of protein, one serve of carbohydrates and a number of vegetables. Whole fruits are served at afternoon tea at 3 pm. Dinner at 5 pm consists of a serve of protein, half a serve of carbohydrates and a number of vegetables. Dessert is part of this meal. Optional supper is served at 8 pm.

4.4.2.2 Physical Health

Poor physical health prevents attendance at school, which in turn inhibits learning and educational achievement (Harrison, 2011).

Worawa Aboriginal College employs a full-time nurse, who was interviewed as part of this project.

Joylene is a registered nurse, who has worked at Worawa Aboriginal College since the end of 2011. Her previous experience includes working as a hospital nurse in Maroondah hospital orthopaedic section, in an aged care home and in Maroondah oncology. It was working in community health in the Torres Strait that led to her interest in Indigenous health; interest in local and historic issues was sparked after seeing a display about Coranderrk at a museum in Lilydale. Subsequently, she applied for the position at Worawa.

Joylene says:

I love the work with the girls, seeing positive changes and making links with community

Joylene acknowledges the enormous growth of learning for herself. She also says that having respect and understanding and being willing to assess the girls’ needs from a medical point of view and to hear their needs from their point of view is paramount for success. Being patient, gentle and kind in order to build up a relationship with the girls is necessary before they will divulge their needs. It is necessary too to be aware that going to the clinic in community can carry a stigma and fear.

Adapting practice has been essential, so Joylene invented the ‘Clinic in a basket’. With her well-stocked basket Joylene visits classrooms on selected mornings. This allows ailments to:

be treated there and then with little fuss or an appointment can be made so the ailment can be attended to later.

The teachers really appreciate this. This allows Joylene more time to spend in her room, meeting with girls who need more complicated treatments. It also obviates the
problems associated with girls either absenting themselves from class or continually seeking release from classes to see her.

Joylene values being a member of a good team and is especially appreciative of the teachers allowing her and Christine, the Wellbeing Coordinator to work “in a very fluid manner”. She is very aware that the primary purpose of Worawa is schooling and she used to feel guilty taking them out of class. There are times when this cannot be avoided particularly when there is a whole school focus, for example when the Dental Van is on site. Because of the team approach, the girls are receiving the same message albeit expressed in many different modes. Feedback to a teacher concerning a consultation with a particular student is given by the return of the note the student brings from the teacher allowing attendance in the sick bay.

The nurses and doctors from the Yarra Primary Health Care give further valuable support. During each year two doctors come weekly to the College. They alternate and each has a different way of relating the girls, who will often ask, “Who’s on”? Some of the doctors on the roster have been involved with the College for some years.

Assessing students’ needs requires the use of all senses especially listening and watching. Joylene believes that watching how a girl interacts with the other girls is a good indicator of whether or not she is feeling well. If there is a communication issue, having someone to come with them who can translate in their language is essential. Being patient and chatting is valuable especially one on one when there is a difficult problem to confront. Sometimes there is the need to ring someone the girl trusts in the community who can mediate the problem. Having a map of Australia on the wall assists in commencing a discussion with the girls, as it enables them to show Joylene where they live and encourages them to tell her about their home.
Joylene notices that physical needs are patterned to emotional needs. She observes patterns of illness occurring at the beginning and end of term. These illnesses can be a result of homesickness at the beginning of term for some and nervousness about returning home at the end of the term for others. Often the girls struggle with the impending passing of a relative or sorry business, which is the process connected to a death in community and the associated ritual or ceremony. This struggle can result in headaches and nausea. If Joylene cannot identify a physical illness when a girl presents, she then refers the girl to the Wellbeing Coordinator. Her major question to girls is:

*Have you got any worries?*

Joylene’s practice of assessment certainly expands on that used in a classic clinic, as she stresses that she needs to have an understanding of why the girl is unwell.

4.4.2.2.1 **Learning about Health Issues**

Learning about health issues is facilitated if the material is a reiteration of something the girls have heard before at home. It is also assisted by an initial physical health assessment for each one in order that education about physical health commences with relevant problems. Joylene speaks of the challenging nature of sexual education, which is an issue for this age group. She says:

*I am passionate about this. If I can teach them in an environment that is safe at many levels, how to look after themselves and protect themselves and be safe for the rest of their lives – that’s fantastic.*

Joylene relates this to Maslow’s (1943) ‘Hierarchy of Needs’, when she says:

*If you don’t meet those bottom of the triangle needs nothing else can happen.*

Joylene knows the girls are learning through the results of repeated health checks. Sometimes they act as they should to remedy the problem and this is evidence of learning. Also

*If they have not done what they should and they say “I know, I know….then I know they are taking it in.*

Repetition of facts and ideas is a strategy Joylene uses and she knows girls have learned when they eventually repeat back to her in another context. The girls are visual learners so Joylene uses posters. The poster on the wall about the effects of smoking is instrumental in commencing relevant discussions, which can be linked to those who smoke at home. Any personal issues are discussed one on one.

Joylene warns of attributing certain traits of the girls to their Aboriginal culture in isolation and points out that development in any culture depends on family life. Universally an only child will be treated differently from a child, who is the first of seven children. Similarly the eldest child will be treated differently from the
youngest in a family, particularly if the family is large. The maturation process occurs
in the context of culture and in relation to all of this.

The challenges Joylene faces include shame or embarrassment in girls facing
health issues; language difficulties or “not wanting to go there” when for example
they may know someone with diabetes and so refrain from learning about the health
consequences of the disease. Another challenge is coming to know and understand the
level of information expected or even desired in the girls’ communities. Peer pressure
may also be a significant challenge. Despite all of these Joylene comments:

*I love what I do.*

Her dream for Worawa is a wellbeing centre, where all wellbeing facilities are housed
providing holistic care for the students at Worawa.

4.4.2.3 *Wellbeing*

Worawa Aboriginal College believes that addressing student health and
wellbeing gives students an improved ability to focus on their education. Wellbeing
issues are identified and supported in a timely manner, through the interaction and
support given to each other by all staff members. Morning and afternoon daily
handover reports between leaders of the boarding, academic and wellbeing teams
ensure this.

There is a Wellbeing Room adjacent to the recreational area so students have
easy access to the Wellbeing Staff. Students are also encouraged to contact the
Wellbeing Team if they have anything they would like to discuss. The wellbeing staff
members are also available to support other staff members.

Worawa Aboriginal College employs a full-time Wellbeing Coordinator,
interviewed as part of this project.

Christine, the Wellbeing Coordinator has been at Worawa Aboriginal College
for seven years, two years part time and five years full time. She says it is a privilege
to work with these girls. To care for them is a huge responsibility and a greater
responsibility to do it well. Boarding school takes away the support systems of home,
so other support systems have to be put in place quickly. The girls have to get used to
new food, language, environment and routines. In addition there are associated
historical problems stemming from the negative experiences on Missions and
Reserves.

Christine speaks of the respect she has for the girls and they for her. Respect
takes time to establish and begins with simple actions. She says it is important to
exhibit a positive regard for the girls rather than giving the impression of possessing
superior knowledge. When the girls feel valued and respected then she can work with
them, hear their stories and observe the change from low self-esteem to pride in their
culture. Christine concurs with the understanding that the negative experiences of
Aboriginal communities over time and continuing into the present have “profound
effects on health and social and emotional wellbeing, for individuals, families and communities” (Dudgeon et al, 2010).

Christine finds the girls “surprisingly open”. The space in which she works is available at lunchtime and the girls freely come and sit there. Here they are able to chat with her and their friends and it is here trusting, respectful relationships are built. Christine says:

*If needs are one on one we close the door and shut the curtain.*
*We used to look for students but now most of the time they come.*
*They learn that we are here or their friends bring them.*

If she finds a girl has a particularly difficult time in solving a problem, she asks how the matter would be handled at home. This enables Christine to learn about the girl’s community life. Sometimes a call to a person in the community is a necessary step for further elucidation.

Christine has seen great change in her time at Worawa. She has seen the lessening of aggression and violence among the girls. She stresses the necessary commitment of all people at the College to work hard to make the College a safe and happy place. In sessions with her, the girls consistently discuss the detrimental effects of behaviours such as exclusion, threatening and bossing. They come and say when these behaviours are happening. Bullying behaviour often occurs because it is safer to be the bully rather than the victim. Victims need to learn how to manage themselves and those who exhibit bullying behaviour need to become aware of other people’s space and how they are interacting and communicating with someone else. Christine is very aware of the basic need to feel safe; she speaks of this in terms of “continued safety”. Only as they become more trusting of a safe environment are the girls able to relax and consider others.

Consideration of others is an indicator to Christine, that the lower levels of Maslow’s (1943) ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ are being met.

Being unfamiliar with the meaning of counselling can be problematic and Christine has strategies to acquaint the girls with the counselling process. Sometimes this requires more than verbal instruction

*I took one girl to witness a session in a café. We sat at another table so she could see the process.*

She is also very aware that learning is particularly difficult for some girls. The trauma they have experienced in their lives may be so great that their coping and resilience strategies are limited. Often their developmental age is well below their chronological age and this is a barrier to learning and so they need learning strategies, appropriate for their developmental level.

*We have seen enormous growth in girls through living with routine and rhythm in the environment. Repeat, repeat, repeat for those who have trouble remembering.*
When the girls are here for longer, Christine is able to discuss their family, their community and previous schools. This however, may take time as:

they are often warned before they come, not to talk about these negative experiences and so it can take up to twelve months to develop some trust and meet their needs.

Christine, in accord with Joylene, says they know the girls are learning when they begin to demonstrate responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. This is further demonstrated when they ask for assistance and when they are observed helping others. Christine cites as an example, her observation of new girl described as “speaking smart” by other students. When challenged by a girl, who had been at Worawa for a time she responded, “I always speak like that”. “Not here” was the response she received. Christine adds:

Initially I used to say “not in this room” no swearing, teasing or pushing and I could hold it here but not elsewhere. Now we request it everywhere – they have come, learnt here and are teaching others.

Christine describes the staff at Worawa as a very good team. They work, share and laugh together. This assists student learning, as the girls because of their previous experiences, are extremely sensitive to staff unity. It is important that all staff members uphold each other in front of students. While she would like more time during the school week to communicate with each one, other than in staff meetings held once a week, Christine says they connect in extended periods when the girls are not at the College. She also acknowledges there are very effective structures, deliberately put in place. One of these is Kim’s ‘Handover’ emails, which are described by all staff members as extremely valuable. These enable all to be well acquainted with occurrences in the residential area that may impact upon student behaviour and learning. Christine is no exception here. She says this translates to student understanding that their needs are being met, because all staff members are acting from a similar knowledge base. Kathryn, Head of Learning and Teaching, also welcomes the connection this makes with the house parents. It builds connections with the students’ home during term time and it is also a mark of good educational practice.

The training the staff members have received in understanding trauma, through being a ‘trauma-informed’ school and consequent appropriate action, means that rather than describe a student as “naughty”, all:

now look beyond the behaviour, conclude that something is not right.

Christine says that because staff members have undertaken professional development in ‘Calmer Classrooms’ and ‘Yarning Up on Trauma’, they are better equipped to understand that:

girls can’t be open to education while other things are happening.
Kathryn supports this understanding and expands on the use of knowledge gained in these sessions, when she says:

> Because we are informed about trauma we know particular students are not in a space to learn.

Incidents of “acting out” have decreased because of this staff training, as the girls know their needs will be met.

Because of her workload girls may still have to wait for Christine to be able to speak with them. While this is difficult because they have to control their emotions, she observes that other students will support them while they wait. Respectful relationships are very evident here as well as Christine’s previously mentioned indicators of learning, particularly consideration of others.

Modelling of appropriate behaviour by staff is very important as girls discern very quickly if there is dissention among adults especially for those students who have come from traumatic situations. Overall the team approach enables delivery of a powerful message to all the girls:

> When girls give up on themselves, we say we are not going to give up on you. We have to believe in them when they don’t believe in themselves.

Leigh, the Performing Arts teacher speaks of how students’ are aware of the Wellbeing Program. She says they understand it is there for them and appreciate it. Leigh found in other schools that students, who use the wellbeing program individually were often marginalised. At Worawa:

> It is part of who we are. They learn to say “I need….., I need to talk to you”. The “I” statements from the Wellbeing program – the girls bring that learning with them into the classroom.

As staff members:

> We are encouraged to use the expertise of Christine and Joylene. They inform us of individual needs. We are also trained in mental health issues.

Kathryn as Head of Learning and Teaching works tirelessly to bring Wellbeing and Curriculum together. She says:

> the girls cannot learn if they are not in the space to concentrate in class. They have a safe place with Christine.

Sally also believes learning cannot happen without wellbeing support and values the work of Christine. She says:

> They can take half an hour to talk to Christine and be back
Feedback to teachers is given by follow-up conversation with the teacher. Sally says this process is far superior to any other she has experienced.

Raelene, speaking of the wellbeing program values its inclusion in the College program rather than being an initiative that runs alongside it. This was not her previous experience when working in the Northern Territory. Here she worked in a school with one counsellor for five hundred students and that person was not always on site. Raelene says the full time employment at Worawa of a Wellbeing Coordinator as well as a registered nurse is very commendable and a great support for teachers.

Success is not achieved with every girl as often the behaviour of fourteen years cannot be changed in one term. Christine says:

> Unfortunately if we can’t make that change quickly enough they have to go and this is another rejection.

The trauma some girls have experienced is so great that their needs cannot be met at Worawa. Christine comments:

> All girls have experienced trauma, that may be generational, community or family violence – we can manage most of this but some we just can’t.

She notes that Worawa now has personnel visiting communities to make some assessment of potential students. This may obviate situations that lead to the disappointment of girls and the staff of the College.

It is relevant to note here that subsequently at a formal Executive meeting attended by Andrew and Kathryn and chaired by Aunty Lois, there was discussion of the enrolment process and the need to discuss expressions of interest prior to application. The work of visiting remote communities carried out by a designated staff member is very much appreciated and in addition it was suggested, that perhaps telephone interviews, conducted before application would gauge the suitability of applicants. It was decided to monitor potential applications weekly from the time of this meeting; this monitoring to be part of Monday morning meetings, including the attendance of the registrar to discuss progress.

Most girls experience homesickness initially and at times they do not want to remain at school. Most students work through these times, with assistance from other students and staff members. At ‘Debutante Dreaming’ in 2014, one of the debutantes Alliyanna acknowledged her intermittent reluctance to remain at Worawa and her ultimate triumph over this reluctance:

> I feel proud and surprised to be here speaking for all the Debutantes tonight. As I am sure my teachers would remember when I first came to Worawa, I would say every term, ‘I’m not coming back next term.’
Alliyanna continues acknowledging her development:

But, here I am and I have learned and changed so much.
I am proud of what I have achieved over the past 4 years.
My family is proud and my community is proud of me too.

and has advice for the younger students:

If I could give a message to the young girls coming up at Worawa, it would be:
- Remember our Worawa Ways.
- Build strong friendships and relationships.
- Use rigour and try your best.
- Have goals for your future and try to make them come true.

Parents value the wellbeing program. Parents commented when interviewed.

The wellbeing programs are completely what we needed for her; they stood out to us.

I am grateful the wellbeing program is there.

4.4.2.3.1 Implementation of Wellbeing programs

‘Restorative Practice’ is used throughout the College. All staff members are annually trained in the process and practice it frequently, both formally and informally. Sessions may be between students or a student and a teacher. Both parties come together, sit and talk. Christine says that the teacher-student sessions have been particularly helpful as a student may misinterpret something, perhaps the meaning of a stern voice. By discussion of the implications of this for both teacher and student, each moves further toward a common understanding of the action and each other. In Christine’s experience the process always improves relationships. “Little” situations between girls can be the focus of the process, before they escalate. Timing is important, as immediate recourse to the process is sometimes impracticable or undesirable. Sinead who teaches music emphasised the importance of a restorative approach for staff and students. She says it allows both parties to avoid or apologise for conflict in many situations, but especially those where there is extra pressure or tiredness involved. ‘Restorative Practice’ allows people to ponder their statements and come to understand the effect these have on others. Through this practice relationships become more respectful.

The ‘Tree of Life’ is another program implemented for students who have experienced trauma in their lives. A senior clinician and an Aboriginal clinician both from Berry Street, Christine, who has been trained as a facilitator and an Elder conduct the program. Those who take part, do so for five weeks. Through the metaphor of a tree the students reflect on the ground where they live, their roots, their history and where they have come from. They develop the trunk from their strengths. Christine comments that some find it difficult to articulate their strengths, so the facilitators have cards denoting possible strengths. Other students contribute to this
development by simply identifying strengths of other students. The branches are their hope and dreams and the leaves the significant people in their lives. The flowers and fruits are the gifts they have received. Some identify these gifts as being language, hunting skills and dances. The leaves falling from the tree depict those who have passed. There is the opportunity to talk about the gifts the girls have received from those people and the fact that these leaves are still nourishing their tree. The facilitators construct their own tree during the program and then:

*We put all the trees together like a forest and talk of the hardships they face – perhaps a forest fire, flood or drought – they regenerate and ask: Is the fire, flood or drought their fault?*

Christine describes this as “a lovely nurturing program” and says the girls wait at the door well before the time to enter. Natural social groups within the College usually work together in a program, allowing the girls to feel safe in discussing community issues. Meditation is also part of the program as well as stories about trees. The final day is a celebration where each shares their tree with a “special” person. In 2013 this celebration took place when the parents were visiting the school and they were able to attend.

The ‘Sexual Assault Program for Secondary Schools’ (SAPPs) is delivered to all students and adjusted to suit the girls. Christine gathers appropriate support materials and omits inappropriate material from the mainstream model. She delivers the program in a different way, a way that is meaningful for the cohort of that particular year. Thus the program is always changing. Basically it concerns the issues of how to be safe, support friends and how to behave in a party scenario. It also addresses the questions: If a friend told you they had been assaulted what would you do? How would you support them? What is sexual assault? Christine comments:

*This is essential learning for the girls as many think sexual assault is an aspect of normal behaviour.......... They must learn they have the right to say ‘no’.*

The material concerning sexual health is displayed and available in the wellbeing room. The girls sit, browse and read the material and ask questions openly, so a lot of learning is achieved informally, in a very relaxed manner. A consultant from the Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (ECASA) co-facilitates this program and also comes to speak to the girls individually as required.

The ‘Shark Cage’ is another program concerning abuse and human rights; usually within a male/female relationship. An abusive male is represented as a “shark” and the “dolphins” depict respectful males. The girls draw a cage and write their rights on the bars: these are to be safe, be with friends, change my mind, say no. Christine says the program is good but wants to modify it by adding more hands on and visual material. She has commenced this process by using a painting that is about sexual assault. Christine displays the painting and talks about the story. She has also obtained relevant DVDs from Central Australia and the Northern Territory.

Christine identifies areas in which she would like to improve programs. Drug and alcohol education is one. Mental health is also important for the girls to
understand. ‘Paying Attention To Self’ (PATS) is a program offered by Yarra Ranges Health for students whose parents have a mental health illness. Christine says her team would like to send more girls to this program because it is beneficial for the students as:

\[
\text{they are not so angry with their parents if they understand the impact mental health issues have on their parents functioning and their consequent ability to be available as parents.}
\]

As well as an increased understanding of their parents, the girls learn how to be safe in such an environment, and the importance of a healthy lifestyle, in terms of their predisposition to certain conditions. They learn to separate mental health issues and addictions.

Christine says the fact that the presenter comes, introduces herself and tells her own story, enables the beginning of a relationship with the girls. Learning styles are also a focus of the program and so the girls come to understand the way they learn best. If they are visual learners they know this and learn how to use this ability in the classroom. Services in other areas are available through Yarra Ranges Health, and the assistance of a neuropsychologist can be accessed through Berry Street.

As well as these major programs some girls have taken part in an equine therapy program. Through a student’s interaction with horses, a therapist can learn more about the participant and is then able to use this information productively in coming to understand the actions and reactions of the participants, in their normal day-to-day interactions with people.

All the girls when asked to whom they would go to if they had a problem, included the Health and Wellbeing staff in their discussion. Zarkema in her speech on Presentation Day, 2013 described Worawa as:

\[
\text{A place where the wellbeing staff make you feel like there’s hope.}
\]

**Link to:** Section 3: Literature Review: Connectedness and Contextualisation
Connectedness and Resilience
Trauma Informed School Wellbeing Programs

4.4.2.4 Health and Physical Education

The home page of Worawa Aboriginal College emphasises participation, physical movement and fun in relation to Sport. Worawa is described as:

\[
\text{A place to participate: The College’s physical education, sports and outdoor education program has an emphasis on participation in a diverse range of healthy and enjoyable activities as well as specific skill identification and development for individual students.}
\]

\[
\text{A place to run around: Sports offered include netball, basketball, softball, football,}
\]

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and soccer along with camping, hiking, canoeing and other recreational activities. Worawa students are excelling in sport through the Worawa Eagles and Worawa All Stars basketball teams and the Worawa softball team.

A place for footy, and other fun: Worawa has teamed with the AFL to create the Worawa AFL Sports Academy. The Academy program includes sports other than football ranging from team sports to individual fitness development and outdoor recreational pursuits. The Worawa AFL Sports Academy emphasises enjoyment, however student’s individual skills are also identified and developed.

The Health and Physical Education Learning Centre, includes Health, Physical Education and Sport. Meagan coordinates Health and Physical Education and Shauna, a personal trainer collaborates with her. Meagan has been at Worawa Aboriginal College for five years and Shauna for four years.

The Health and Physical Education Learning develops curriculum using the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2012). In their interviews, Meagan and Shauna demonstrated their understanding of, and sensitivity to, the difference between a ‘productive’ and a ‘destructive’ struggle as described in Allen, (2012).

When asked to identify significant factors that assist in their work at Worawa, Meagan and Shauna both included the higher retention rate of students. This is helpful because the routines devised and taught by these staff members are known and understood by an increasing number of girls; routines such as coming down to the gym and bringing the right shoes. They have implemented some basic routine actions for a healthy life, for example drinking plenty of water, making healthy eating choices and being active during the day rather than sitting in free time. They have also developed exercise plans with and for each girl to take home and use over the holiday period. These are given to them in a folder with material to be displayed to their families. Meagan says:
Girls have said when they came back from the holidays that they put them up on the wall at home. They took them out of the folder in the hope someone may look at them and they maybe implemented. Just the little kids seeing their big sisters and aunties are learning to be physical and bringing this home.

Some girls returning from holidays tell her they have walked an hour each day or have exercised. Meagan and Shauna know their students have learned when they see them passing on knowledge to other students or report on activities at home.

As well as specific testing, observation is a key assessment strategy for Meagan and Shauna and they maintain that at lunchtime on average, seventy percent of girls are “up and doing something”. They note that this is a great improvement when compared to behaviour in previous years. They also note that many girls are out playing sport in the morning before school classes commence. Sport builds connections but Meagan and Shauna say it takes time to build these. Their most effective strategy is to be patient and allow students the time to come and watch and so develop the confidence to join in. This strategy is very successful as all girls now take fitness tests for granted and are not embarrassed in any way. This was not previously the case as reported by Deakin University (Taket, 2010) in their pilot program, ‘Promoting Health and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Girls’ (Appendix 24). Shauna reported to the program manager:

there were difficulties in motivating the students to participate at the beginning of the term. The students’ views and concerns
expressed at the beginning of the term indicate that some students were anxious about exercise and exercising in public.

The report states:

*Students’ fitness and strength was measured in a number of different ways: the six minute walk test; pedometer steps during exercise sessions; and performance at a number of activities, push ups, squats, prone brace and wall sit. For the students fully participating in the program, the majority demonstrated improvements in performance over the course of the term, between 61% and 96%.*

Involving all students is an ongoing focus and matching sports to students’ strengths is paramount in achieving this goal. Meagan speaks of the misconception that all Aboriginal girls love sport or have positive experiences when playing sport. This is not the case and so she understands it is her task to identify strengths she observes in her students and channel these into participation in a particular sport that may suit the individual. She has specific strategies that emanate from an understanding that many sporting situations are confronting, if teachers only cater for those who are extremely proficient. Meagan notes they also have to be culturally aware as:

*Many of the girls are observers and they sort of sit back and take it all in before they give it a go - and we respect that. Praising the girls in front of a group is just as embarrassing as making them feel bad. This is hard for us as we always want to compliment them; it depends on the personality of the girl. I will either be very obvious about praising and she will love it or I approach a girl very quietly and say “you’ve done a good job”.*

Meagan and Shauna also spend a great deal of time sitting and talking with individual girls. This allows discussion of strategies to work collaboratively and avoid conflict. They know if the students disengage in sport they usually disengage in other subjects as well and there is a reason for it. They can then work with other staff members to identify the cause and put a plan in place to address the underlying problem. While a number of challenges are identified Meagan believes her students can learn, an essential belief according to Sarra (2011). There is also evidence here of the teacher as learner (Groome, 1998); both the students and Megan and Shauna are in dynamic interaction.

Introducing new sports is always challenging, as it is difficult to convince girls who enjoy and perhaps excel in certain sports to try others, particularly if they find these new sports somewhat difficult at the outset. Health issues such as sore bodies and headaches also lead to non-participation. Shauna says:

*A great way to build resilience is through sport. It’s just helping them to push that little bit further. If you haven’t ever done 30 seconds of squats, that’s really quite difficult to do -they will wake up the next morning and have sore legs and think their*
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Meagan and Shauna note that adolescents need five to seven serves of carbohydrates per day. ‘Promoting Health and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Girls’ (Taket, op.cit) noted the benefits of working on food and nutrition topics with the house parents with a view to developing healthier choices for meals, thus assisting students to gain and maintain a healthy weight. In 2013 and 2014 Kim manages the residential shopping, so there are healthy choices for meals and no junk food and there is communication between academic and residential staff in these matters. Shauna says:

*Girls who are underweight are raising their weight, which is good and those who come a little overweight are not gaining weight. Food intake is important but exercise is more important.*

Meagan would like to introduce more Indigenous games into the Physical Education program. A swimming pool and stadium would greatly increase the range of physical activities that could be undertaken.

Alliyanna is a student who achieves to a high level in sport. She says:

*At my old school I didn’t play sport but when I came here I learned a lot. I play basketball, netball, softball and cricket.*

Alliyanna also says she has fun in learning:
Every time we play dodge ball all the girls come together and have fun.

In addition to sport both she and Regina valued learning about their muscular system.

Stephanie, writing in the Worawa Year Book, 2014 describes Meagan as:

*most kind and very humorous.*

She adds:

_The students at Worawa love PE classes because of the kind of Teacher Meagan is. She makes each one of us feel comfortable with ourselves._

4.4.2.4.1 Local Sporting Competitions

In 2007, Worawa formed a partnership with the Australian Football League (AFL) to become a SPORTS ACADEMY. The Academy operates as an integral part of the College’s operations and includes activities ranging from team sports to individual fitness development and outdoor recreational pursuits. Emphasis is on individual participation in a diverse range of healthy and enjoyable physical activities. All activities have a focus upon physical and mental wellbeing and consistent academic performance whilst respecting and upholding cultural values.

The Academy provides strong support to the Worawa Model of Learning but this can particularly be seen within the Health and Physical Education Learning Centre. Students have the opportunity to participate in a range of sports including archery, basketball, football, netball, soccer, softball, swimming, touch football with appropriate skill development provided in Physical Education classes and in
Students are involved in a number of local sporting competitions: Netballers play in the Lilydale and Yarra Valley association; basketballers in the Kilsyth association; soccer players in the Victorian Churches Football Association; softballers in the Knox association. This exposes them to healthy competition, encourages their team spirit; and gives them social interactions with others. The Worawa Facebook page (https://www.Facebook.com/pages/Worawa-Aboriginal-College-Official-Page/222579758745) reports:

*Saturday saw the Worawa soccer team achieve a 3-3 draw, the U15 netballers narrowly defeated and the open netball team triumph. Well done girls. Facebook Worawa girls played in the Softball Preliminary Final on Saturday and won 19-11. This meant they progressed to the Semi-Finals on Sunday. The girls played so well and only just lost, 5-6. We have now finished the season and placed third on the overall ladder!!*

*and*

*Worawa basketball team U 18 placed 2nd in seasonal competition – unfortunately have to forfeit Grand Final game as they will have gone home for term break. So proud of our girls - they play consistently well and sometimes come in for some unsportsmanlike comments from the opposition - designed to make them react but they do not retaliate - it just makes them play harder! Well done girls.*

The Worawa Year Book, 2014 contains Stephanie’s description of Worawa teams’ performances in the various sports that are part of the local competition. Her description includes more than aspects of the physical performance and scores, when she writes, speaking of basketball:

*We always worked as a team. If we fell down we picked each other up. If we were many points down we got back up and won the game. If the other team were scoring we would cheer them on and smile. We love to play and work as a team. We might lose one week but we win the next week.*

Parents express appreciation of the sporting program. Lorraine is very pleased that her daughter could continue specialised development because:

*She is a very good sports’ person and Worawa College is a stepping stone for her to experience her sport down in Melbourne, where all the professional sports people are. She wanted to come down and experience her sport in Melbourne.*
The number of sports her granddaughter plays is appreciated by Mildred:

She plays in the netball, basketball and soccer I am very proud of her.

While Sheryl is amazed at the enthusiasm displayed by her daughter, in what she understands to be adverse circumstances:

She’s out there playing soccer in the hailstorm. I said, “You are going to get your death of cold”, but she replied, “No Mum, I’m enjoying it so much”.

Link to: Section 3: Literature Review: Connectedness and Contextualisation
Connectedness and Resilience

4.4.2.4.2 Deadly Sista Girlz Program

Throughout this year, Worawa students have been part of the Deadly Sista Girlz Netball Program, run by The David Wirrpanda Foundation. Over the course of the year, the girls have not only learnt the rules and skills required to play netball, they have also been learning interpersonal skills, self-esteem, the dangers of drugs and alcohol and how to be wise with their money. Indigenous basketball player, Kate Malpass and Melbourne Vixens netballer, Sarah Wall have taken the girls through these topics and have become respected mentors amongst the students. (Worawa Newsletter, Term 4, 2012)

The David Wirrpanda Foundation employs Catherine Gurney as the Grants Manager for the East Coast. In 2005, David, who is an ex-Worawa Aboriginal College student constituted the Foundation. Catherine coordinates the ‘Deadly Sista Girlz Program’ (Literature Review: Section 2.8.2) at Worawa Aboriginal College; mentors deliver the components of the program and report to Catherine. The mentors are Aboriginal women aged between twenty and twenty-five, so they are like older sisters to the girls at school, hence the name, ‘Deadly Sista’. Young women of this age give the girls the opportunity to open up in a different way than that offered by older people. There is no program in 2014 because of lack of funding. In 2011, 2012, and 2013 the program was delivered every week for 3 hours. Sources of funding are
the Commonwealth Government and various philanthropic organisations. Catherine has observed the mentors delivering the program and has worked with Meagan to organise the sessions. She also liaised with the College Wellbeing Coordinator Christine, so as the timing of segments align with the school wellbeing program. She comments:

*It is a pretty special program at Worawa as it fits with the Worawa Model. It is a unique school; the Worawa Way works.*

The focus of the components of the program is Health and Wellbeing and Cultural Identity is the component always delivered first. Catherine says the delivery of this usually takes a full term, because it is basic to all the other sections of the program. Most ‘Deadly Sista Girlz’ programs are delivered to Aboriginal girls in mainstream schools and Catherine notes that when compared to these girls, there is a far larger percentage of Worawa students who are aware of their own culture. She says:

*Worawa students speak their own languages and the fact that culture is always talked about at Worawa makes the delivery so much easier.*

Mentors do not always have language, so they may discuss their names or the locality from which they come. Catherine also states that:

*in other schools our program is often the only Indigenous program included, so ours are the only Indigenous people they see.*

She also emphasises the mentors as role models and that:
learning how to interact socially is the most important thing we want them to learn.

Thus learning is much more than retaining information and to demonstrate this Catherine refers to the Infinity Diagram (Appendix 25) and says:

_The girls are in the space between white and Aboriginal culture. They must respect themselves and then they can help others and then the wider community. Always in their Aboriginal culture and everyday they enter the white world of education, employment and law but they never leave their Aboriginal world. The Third Space is being in both – to be proud Aboriginal women in the Third Space._

Longevity of mentors in the context of the program is major in order to develop productive relationships. Catherine explains that relationships were built with the girls, especially through two of the mentors working in Worawa for the three years. They came to know many of the girls and further connections were sometimes made:

_One mentor in 2013 was a Melbourne Vixen and often brought her Vixen friends to the school. She helped out with the netball team. Then this involved the Saturday as well as the Wednesday._

Initial funding came from the “No school, no play” initiative, hence the netball focus. Catherine also said that Megan and Shauna had a good relationship with the mentors and also with the girls. Such relationships assist the work of the mentors and this was particularly evident when Meagan and Shauna discussed the girls’ progress between sessions. The mentors see the girls over whole year and see them ”come out of their shells” and participate more fully. This is very obvious in netball but more difficult in other areas.

The mentors have an outcomes framework and the development of assessment tools is ongoing. According to Catherine, their development is often frustrated by the unrealistic demands of funding bodies. She understands fully that there must be rigorous reporting of achievement to these bodies but stresses the tools must be relevant as well as rigorous, in order to deliver a valid assessment of progress. Catherine spoke of the problems of using a survey tool. If it was written they found that girls often copied from each other, as their literacy requirements were not of a sufficient level to understand the question. If a physical “cross the line” strategy was used they found the younger ones followed the older girls. They have found pie charts where girls colour in sections, as well as yarning circles to be a much better indicator of individual progress. She says:

_the yarning circles went very well._

Delivery of the program brings challenges. Funding is always difficult to obtain. Catherine applied for funding from twelve sources this year but received none for Worawa. In addition the mentors need time to establish rapport with the students. Numbers of students in a group at Worawa are larger than the national average.
Mentors at Worawa worked with a group of 36 students whereas the national average is 15. The fact that some girls do not like net ball, means that it is a challenge to engage them in this focus.

Despite these challenges Catherine persists in her quest for funding as she is firm in the belief, not sufficiently understood and acted upon by governments that:

“if you invest in women and girls they take the learning back to their community”.

A challenge for the girls at Worawa is:

Us not being there - they miss the program - they miss out

Meagan, the Health and Physical Education teacher at Worawa, speaks highly of Catherine Gurney’s organisational ability. Meagan says:

The Deadly Sista Girlz program was conducted each week for two hours. Overall the program was well designed. The first hour was discussion and inside games. The second hour involved netball and basketball. The average size of the group was 20-25 students. Discussions were over a range of relevant topics, dealt with in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner. Topics included managing money, relationships, drugs and alcohol and safe sex.

She describes the mentors as:

very understanding and nurturing of the girls.

Link to: Section 3: Literature Review: Deadly Sista Girlz Program

4.4.2.4.3 Pathways to Womanhood

The Worawa College website describes the Pathways to Womanhood program:

The primary objective of the Pathways to Womanhood Program is to provide opportunities for the young women who attend Worawa to develop their self confidence and self-esteem grounded in their Indigenous heritage but ready to take their place in the broader Australian Society. Pathways to Womanhood is a two year program that provides a series of modules and experiences for the young women attending Worawa to develop their leadership skills.

The approach is one of action learning and reflection which includes:

• health education, health promotion activities and self-awareness and self-esteem building
• cultural awareness and development of cultural identity
• leadership development
• community service and work experience
• mentoring.
The approach at Worawa is to strengthen the identity and self-esteem of young women as Indigenous Australians so that they are able to bridge both worlds and take their place as leaders within the Indigenous community and Australian society.

‘The Worawa Way’ pedagogy has a focus on building a culture of respect with emphasis on supporting young women to make a healthy transition to adulthood. Along with the core academic subjects, young women are given a range of opportunities to develop skills and knowledge in a program of ‘Pathways to Womanhood’. This program consists of a series of modules that lead the young women through a pathway of developmental activities, nurturing self-esteem, pride in Aboriginal identity and developing confidence and ability to ‘Walk in both Worlds’ connecting to leadership roles within the school and wider community. The program aims to lay the foundation for young women to take their place as future leaders within the Indigenous community and Australian society.

The Pathways to Womanhood program is aimed at developing:

- Self-care
- Self-esteem
- Self-awareness
- Self-acceptance
- Self-confidence
- Social interaction
- Pride in Aboriginal identity
- Communication; Trust; Hope

Aunty Lois states:

At Worawa we believe in the power of the ‘ripple effect’. The girls who go through the program are the mothers and leaders of the future – future decision makers in the care of children in their family, clan, community. When the joy of achievement is shared at home, the whole community becomes aware of the possibilities for their children also.

Each year, older students are invited to participate in the ‘Pathways to Womanhood Program’. This program supports students in their final transition year in a variety of ways.

The ‘Pathways to Womanhood Program’ is supported by Worawa personnel as well as external specialist services and individuals contributing particular expertise including:

- hairdressing; massage; makeup; manicure, skin care, beauty
- Integration Facilitator: etiquette; deportment, wardrobe
- House Parents selected by expression of interest
- Arts Coordinator and other staff members co-opted in the production of events
- Up to 18 students, selected by staff nomination, based on the criteria of demonstrated readiness to take on leadership. Students must be willing to participate.
Combination of in and out of school time. The learning activities are spread across the residential and academic programs. Culture underpins all at Worawa and health and wellbeing are not only delivered as curriculum subjects but ‘lived’ through daily life and programs delivered by the Wellbeing Coordinator or School Nurse and external services such as the Wirrpanda Foundation, Deadly Sista Girlz. Lunch time sessions and the last hour of school day is reserved for electives.

The program outline includes action learning and reflection

- Program introduction and development of individual and group goals.
- Establishment of house community: a community of trust.
- Self care: physical and mental
- Communication skills: including public speaking, performance and presentation
- Leadership skills, including what it means to be an Aboriginal leader
- Celebration dinner at a restaurant

The ‘Pathways to Womanhood Program’ is mapped to Achievement Standards in Health and Physical Education and to the General Capability, Personal and Social Capability (Appendix 26).

The ‘Pathways to Womanhood Program’ culminates in a major event at the end of the year. To date these events have been the Anniversary Event to mark the first ever Aboriginal Debutante Ball. The ‘Stylin’ Up with Worawa’ fashion parade, the ‘Sapphires’ production and ‘Debutante Dreaming’ are also Anniversary Events.

Young women in the Pathways to Womanhood Program prepare for transitions and independent living. Each girl must write an application requesting inclusion in the group. They are housed in a ‘Senior House’ where they are guided in all aspects of the program by a House Parent who has been selected through an expression of interest process. The girls selected have extra responsibilities in the house. The rigour connected with these expectations, including standards of dress and uniform and their mentoring of the younger students is complemented by the rigour of not only learning but also demonstrating the learning of the various points of the program. Some young women have the opportunity to experience a higher level of
independence through being placed in an on-site apartment. Young women in the ‘Pathways to Womanhood Program’ are selected for special events such as representing the College at WIPCE, Bond University Indigenous Gala, the Long Walk Women’s Luncheon, the Wirrpanda Foundation event and others.

Learning in the ‘Pathways to Womanhood Program’ is built on the same principles as all programs at Worawa. It is particularly significant however, in developing Social Competence, another trait of a resilient person (Bernard, 1991), exhibited through:

- Responsiveness,
- Cultural flexibility
- Empathy,
- Caring,
- Communication skills,
- A sense of humour

The descriptions, quotations and linked videos in this section demonstrate the girls:

- Empathy towards their peers and adults
- Ability to communicate in a range of ways with a range of people
- Ability to “engage and enhance their own and each other’s capacities” (Macy, p. 31).

The ‘Pathways to Womanhood program’ reflects the understanding expressed by Hare (2010) that life experience and not academic excellence alone is the concern of holistic education. It also demonstrates Mahmoudi’s (2011) contention that he curriculum in an holistic setting goes far beyond the acquisition of basic skills and is developed within a broad vision (Mahmoudi et al., 2011).

4.4.2.4.3.1 Dinners

One of the highlights of the program are the dinners held each semester at Yarra Valley Lodge. They provide not only an opportunity to experience fine dining, but appropriate dress, socialising and dining etiquette. Students are often inspired to share their journey through public speaking. The Worawa Facebook page August 9th has a report and pictures.

_A fun night at the Pathways to Womanhood dinner last night – thanks to MECS boys for joining us and Yarra Valley Lodge for a wonderful dinner._

During 2014, some students were invited to a dinner hosted by the Richmond Rotary Club. Here they had the chance to sit among and converse with the members. Observers reported that the girls appeared very comfortable and poised on this occasion.
4.4.2.4.3.2 ‘Debutante Dreaming’

In 2011 Worawa held a Debutante Ball, where girls from Worawa made their debut, partnered by boys from Scotch College and Luther College in Melbourne. In 2014, in ‘Debutante Dreaming’, boys from Mt Evelyn Christian School and Melbourne Grammar School partnered the girls.

The Worawa Debutante Ball (2014), entitled ‘Debutante Dreaming’ was held August 29th at Yarra Valley Lodge. Twelve students were presented to a group of Elders, including Aunty Lois Peeler AM, Aunty Fay Carter, Aunty Zeta Thomson, Aunty Diane Singh, Aunty Daphne Milward, Aunty Karen Briggs, Uncle Rod Briggs and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children, Andrew Jackomos. This was the concluding function of the Pathways to Womanhood program in 2014.

In her speech at the event, Aunty Lois Peeler outlined the reasons for this function.

It was the Worawa founder Hyllus Maris’ vision, that our young people receive an education that equips them to capitalise on any and all opportunities life may present to them and to do so in the full and positive knowledge of who they are as Aboriginal people. Worawa’s holistic education program is designed to do just that. Tonight is the culmination of the College’s Pathways to Womanhood program. The young ladies presented tonight have been prepared for this event through an intensive education program, where they have the opportunity to talk about some of the challenges of their transition to adulthood and to learn new skills that will help them to take their place in the world. Indigenous communities the world over celebrate various stages of rights of passage and in keeping
with the Worawa Aboriginal College philosophy of preparing young women to take their place as leaders with the ability to walk in both worlds. ‘Debutante Dreaming’ is the fusion of traditional Aboriginal ceremonial practice and Western tradition, preparing our young women for the transition to adulthood.

Twelve debutantes were presented. Those present at the function were impressed by the confidence of both the girls and the boys. Many hours were spent training the group in the movements of the dance and the various points of etiquette associated with such an occasion. Hair and make up as well as dresses were appropriate for the occasion and the attention to detail in the preparation was evident. All performed extremely well and as they were presented, appeared calm and focused.

The students presented were:

Alliyanna Tipiloura from Wadeye (Port Keats), Northern Territory
Andrea Farrow, a Larrakia woman from Darwin, Northern Territory
Elvina Waywaythun from Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island), Northern Territory
Hakira Coleman-Wilson from Adelaide, South Australia
Jaden Croker from Darwin, Northern Territory
Jamira Hunter from Melbourne, Victoria
Kahealea Coleman-Wilson from Adelaide, South Australia
Kira Biscoe from Yuendumu, North West of Alice Springs
Maxine Daniels from Milikapiti, (Melville Island, Tiwi Islands)
Regina Inkamala Lankin from Hermannsburg, Northern Territory
Rhianna Nambiard from Willowra, Northern Territory
Tanya Bundhaynga Wunungmurra form Galiwin’ku (Elcho Island), Northern Territory
After the presentation and the Debutante’s dance, Aunty Lois addressed them all with the words:

*Well my heart is bursting with pride right now. Girls I am so proud of you. And for the young men who have accompanied our debutante’s tonight, you give us hope, hope for the future of our country, that we can come together in recognition and reconciliation and I thank you for that.*

Arts Coordinator, Leigh Waters who coordinated the preparations for these events says that they encapsulate two-way learning in that it employs a Western construct, the debutante ball, and embeds this in an Aboriginal cultural context.

In 1947 before Aboriginal people were counted as citizens, a group of young Yorta Yorta women made their debut in the Collingwood Town Hall. This was a momentous occasion when the debutantes were presented to Sir George and Lady Knox. Aunty Lois was a flower girl at this ball and so there is a direct connection between this function and an important historical occasion. The Worawa ball honours the debutantes of 1947. Worawa Facebook has photos of the occasion in an entry (July 27th, 2014: https://www.Facebook.com/pages/Worawa-Aboriginal-College-Official-Page/222579758745)

Leigh says that for the girls in 2014, participation in the Debutante Ball is a way of:

*honouring their own family and language group and the communities from which they come, as well as celebrating their personal identity and potential and their striving in that, both in this school and in their lives generally.*

Traditional dance performed by young women at the commencement of the evening and the speech by debutante Alliyanna who introduced herself in her Tiwi language further enhanced the cultural context of the evening.
Leigh believes that relationship and respect are important elements of ‘Debutante Dreaming’ and the resulting interaction between Worawa students is crucial in building self-esteem. In order to succeed in the venture the girls:

*learned to support each other but not compete with each other. They realised they had to help each other and that it wasn’t a solo event. They had to encourage each other.*

Respectful relationships, student to partner were also important:

*Learning to respect the boys for what they bring to the process and expecting respect from them.*

Leigh described the partners as a particularly relaxed and happy group of boys who wanted to participate:

*They enjoyed the company of the girls and had fun. They had fun and were incredibly respectful.*

Relationship with family is also enhanced as the girls are:

*showcasing themselves to them by their being present or by talking about this at home; talking about being in this process, about growing up, about presenting themselves and speaking about culture.*

The video of the production attests to its success: [http://vimeo.com/106158102](http://vimeo.com/106158102)
In a speech Andrea, a debutante in 2014, described her journey along the pathway to womanhood. She described her experience of schooling prior to coming to Worawa:

As I got older I wanted to go back to pre-school because during my middle and senior school years I was bullied and it drove me away from school.

Andrea left school for a year and then decided to return to set an example for her younger siblings. The bullying continued and her Aunty and Mum decided to send her to Worawa where she is “happily completing Year 10 for the third time”. She described the difficulties of her commencement at Worawa and the beginning of friendship:

The first time I arrived at Worawa I was nervous and scared because I didn’t want a repeat of the bad times I had experienced. I acted tough, by not looking at or talking to anyone until I met my beautiful room mate, Kahealea. She welcomed me into her room with the most warming smile. The first night I cried and the second and the third and every night for two weeks but then I started to settle in.

Andrea is proud of her success:

I have proven wrong the people who used to put me down and call me dumb. I had thought I was the kind of person who couldn’t sit in a classroom for long, but I guess I have proven myself wrong too.
She spoke of the support she receives:

_When I have made a mistake or when I think I’m failing, I get great support._

and the support she is able to give:

_I feel special too, because the girls at Worawa look up to me and always come to me when they have problems. They come to me for comfort, my opinions and my advice. I am their big sister._

Overall Andrea says:

_Worawa has shaped and transformed me from a scared immature girl to this grown up, confident and bright woman – a leader._

She acknowledges she will always be learning and concludes by saying to the girls:

_All you need is the 4Rs: we have been guided by the 4 Worawa Ways:_

• _Respect: to respect ourselves and others_  
• _Rigour: to keep going when the times are tough_  
• _Relationship: to build positive relationships with our peers_  
• _Responsibility: to own up to your mistakes and take on the role of being an older girl._

Andrea’s ambition is to be a counselor and she concluded by thanking her family for sending her to Worawa and Aunty Lois for accepting her into the school and everyone else for having faith in her.

**Link to:** Section 3: Literature Review: Connectedness and Contextualisation  
Connectedness and Resilience  
Trauma Informed School Wellbeing Programs

Section 8: Appendices 25 & 26

4.4.3 The Arts

Art, Drama, Music, Dance and Media are key elements of The Arts Learning Centre. The College Arts Coordinator liaises with a large number of external organisations, which support/provide program for the Worawa students. These include The Willin Centre at the University of Melbourne, the Malthouse Theatre, Bangarra Dance Company, Ilbiljirri Theatre Company. The Visual Art Program is designed to build on a student’s experience and knowledge while challenging them to do and be their best. This program enables the Worawa students to produce artwork of exceptional quality. Arts Business Management, which is undertaken by senior students, provides students with the knowledge and skills to manage their Arts Products within Community.
4.4.3.1 Performing Arts

Leigh teaches Drama, as an elective subject and coordinates the Dance program, which includes traditional Aboriginal dance and contemporary hip-hop classes. She also coordinates whole school productions and has been at Worawa Aboriginal College for five years.

Leigh recognises the need to be professional and focus on the curriculum but is also adamant that a teacher “must be in the present”, so to be “with the person rather than with the content”. She says she learns from the girls and consequently takes cues from them. This fosters a sense of belonging in the group, as all are learners, including the teacher. In addition, she reflects deeply in order to understand their method of engagement. Leigh says:

I learn so much from them - I expect to learn from them.
Facilitation of the arts is to “draw it out of them”.

Body language, facial expressions, and showing interest in each student both in and out of class time, combine to facilitate the development of relationships with the girls. Relationships are further developed by using ‘circles of sharing’ and always beginning rehearsals of production with drama games. In addition, drama games enable the focused rehearsal time to be much more effective.

Leigh also understands performing arts to be of great assistance in the nurturing and celebration of culture. She says:

those who live in a cultural context need to recognise their culture because they live in it and don’t know it is there and so don’t recognise it. Those who aren’t connected need to find out and so this assists them in the finding out

4.4.3.1.1 Drama

Leigh teaches drama as an elective for the older girls. Two of her students are studying monologues. One girl is writing a monologue and another learning one. Leigh says:

The girl who is writing disengages from most other subjects but really engages in acting. To write, she watched lots of monologues and we talked through audience and purpose and what interest her. She is now in the writing phase; she improvises, then writes.

The end product for both is performance at assembly or another designated group. There will be feedback from this. The girl wants to be a writer and actor; the girl learning the script wants to act only. Leigh explains further:

Improvising has assisted greatly. Even if they don’t get to
perform, the process of learning and writing is beneficial.
Improvisation requires high levels of self esteem and speed of thought and action.

The Drama subject for the junior girls has focussed on mime. Leigh constantly tells the students:

*Mime and movement are language beyond words.*

The learning process encompasses teacher and students:

*We all learnt together. I found it really great learning with them. We started with their own stories and celebrations in community, where appropriate and how we use the body, face and stance.*

Some time was spent in this discussion and then this was supplemented with material from Youtube. Leigh is very interested in exploring body language with the girls, as she has seen it misinterpreted at Worawa, in interactions between students and teacher to student. Exploring stance and movement in some depth, enables understanding to develop. Using the simple exercise of walking to a chair in certain ways elicited the comments:

“Oh, do you think that when I do that?”

and

“I think this when you do that.”

At times girls are frustrated when their intention is misinterpreted but this leads to further discussion and elucidation. When identifying gestures:

*the girls at first came up with hardly any gestures but gradually we realised we had so many we used so often, some in common and some slightly different.*

Telling stories through mime using material from Youtube as stimuli followed. The girls discovered that First Nations people were the first people of mime. This was contrasted with the stylistic approach demonstrated in French mime. Leigh comments that the girls:

*very quickly learn that if they don’t participate respectfully it won’t work because people will be too embarrassed to participate. I have seen a lot of self-modification of behaviour in those classes. Girls want to watch and they watch and realise, if they ridicule by inappropriate stance and gaze, it will close it down and they don’t want to close it down because it is fun.*

She acknowledges the improvement in participation because she has set the material in a cultural context. She also recognises the strong connection to wellbeing.
Leigh acknowledges that responsibility and rigour underpin dance classes and that it is very obvious to everyone if students are irresponsible. She says:

*You are part of a team in dance and your performance affects everyone. This is very obvious to students.*

The girls enjoy both traditional and hip-hop dance classes. Leigh describes dance as:

*a language without words.*

Katarina, a student writing for the Worawa year Book, 2014, describes both traditional and hip hop dance classes and performances and notes the dedication and work required for a successful performance. She writes concerning performances of traditional dance:

*The girls give up their free time to practice the dances from all over Australia. They give 100% every time they go and have to perform. It is a true demonstration of Rigour and a credit to those girls and their communities.*

Leigh says she probably uses verbal feedback too much, in that verbal is not important to the girls. Often it is culturally inappropriate to praise one to the detriment of another. In order to improve their movements they learn from each other in the cultural context, or Elders come in and help them. In other dance styles Leigh gives directions and assist the girls to improve their technique. The girls are fortunate to be able to attend workshops with Bangarra Dance Company but many find these workshops very difficult:

*as everything is either right or wrong. I need to select those*
I take to workshops because they are so physically demanding.

Shanelle has been selected to do work experience with Bangarra Dance Company.

Leigh notes she needs to be careful and rigorous when researching cultural material for dances. Girls are generally proud of their dances and wish to share them. Some have shared their dances that their mothers taught them. They can be upset if their dance isn’t included but often they don’t want to teach their dance, so this is problematic.

I have to be careful of who and how I involve. I ask the girls but it can’t be left totally to them, as they may be too selective.

The therapeutic aspect of dance and support for each other is evident in dance class. Leigh described an instance:

In one dance session a particular girl wanted to keep dancing after class because she said “I only feel relaxed when I am dancing. The others kept dancing with her until she said she had had enough. This took half and hour after school time.

After this session a Darwin girl said:

“Now I have an Aboriginal dance to show my mum and she will be so proud”.

4.4.3.1.3 Music

Sinead who has only been at Worawa in 2014 teaches Music. She also teaches English and her love of music reveals itself there when she says:

I love to use songs to teach grammar.

Sinead teaches individual piano and singing lessons and also leads the choir. She notes the influence private tuition has on building relationships:

I like the private tuition as it gives me a chance to build relationships one on one and to have a bit more fun than in the classroom. We practise songs I want and ones they want.

The music program is optional; 15 students were in the choir in April and 10 individual students in piano lessons. Sinead is encouraged by the fact that:

the Arts lead to expression at Worawa. It doesn’t matter if they are not English literate to participate in the Arts.
In May the choir of 17 students sang at the Indigenous Remembrance Day Ceremony at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. This ceremony is significant for the students; Stephanie in her reflection on the Gallipoli story, in the Worawa Year Book 2014, says:

*The Gallipoli story is important to our country and to Indigenous Australians. Australia is a very safe and comfortable place to live in today and I think it would be different if people, including my ancestors, had not had the courage to serve and fight for our country.*

At this performance the Worawa choir honoured all the Indigenous men and women who were part of the armed forces. A video of their performance is available: [http://vimeo.com/97189210](http://vimeo.com/97189210)

Sinead says:

*Hard work and rigour and constant practice brought the choir to performance level. I am very tough on the girls and I have high expectations and they responded. We performed well on Remembrance Day - a fantastic performance. Then we had a paid performance when we were commissioned to sing for members of the Stolen Generation, and they were perfect. They behaved like a professional choir.*

In choosing songs for the choir Sinead speaks of working in a two-way model. For these external performances she will include Aboriginal songs but she also says they sing popular songs at the girls’ requests. She emphasises the importance of choosing songs that are:

*significant and have meaning for them – that make sense to them – are girl focussed.*

In Term 3 Sinead began an ‘a capella’ group. The girls were selected by formal audition:
The formality of me behind a desk with pen and paper made them very nervous. I did a second round audition and it was really interesting to see how seriously they took it. They really wanted to be in the ‘a capella’ group.

With the assistance of all the staff members, Sinead and Leigh organised ‘Worawa’s Got Talent’ at the end of term and:

there was a huge list of girls who wanted to perform solo in front of everybody and when the day started the list grew. They have come on in leaps and bounds - they really want to express themselves. Those who didn’t want to perform were the roadies and it brought the whole school community together.

4.4.3.1.3.1 Student Perspective

Kahealea, who has been at Worawa for three years and is a member of the choir and ‘a capella’ group, says that when she first arrived there were no choir, piano or singing lessons. She remembers a weekly lesson with a visiting teacher. She says:

Now we have a choir with committed girls and we have music lessons and singing lessons; music and singing lessons for half an hour and choir lessons happen very week in lesson six; depending on events that are coming up, we have practices at lunchtime. We also have an ‘a capella’ group with six other girls.

Kahealea says their repertoire includes:

A song from Aunty Lois’ Yorta Yorta language, Burra Ferra, in the Yorta Yorta language, and Yellow Bird, from the ‘Sapphires’.

She remembers specific performances, including the very first at Scotch College and the performance on Aboriginal Remembrance Day at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. She also recalls a paid performance for the RACV Club, saying:

That one was a very important one, because it was a service for the Stolen Generation. We sang Arnhem Land Lullaby and Burra Ferra.

She also remembers the ‘a capella’ group formed later in the year performing at the Richmond Rotary Club.

Kahealea speaks of her early reluctance to join the choir and of Sinead’s influence in her decision to remain part of the group.

At first I didn’t want to be a part of the choir, because I had offered to join choir just for the Scotch College performance,
because they were low on numbers. I kinda said to Sinead, “Look Sinead I think I’m going to leave choir” and she kinda said, “You’ll be letting yourself down – and the whole choir”. I kinda felt guilty, so I stayed a little bit longer but then I said to Sinead, “I really think I’m going to leave choir”, and she said the same things and it just got to me and now I’ve just been in choir for like the whole year.

Kahealea says she enjoys performing with the choir:

but you need to have a lot of rigour and commitment if you want to be a part of choir.

She describes the difficulties she found:

Sometimes it’s hard having patience. There was one time when we had to perform a song and we were in the room for nearly two hours and we just kept going over this one verse. It just takes a lot of rigour and patience.

Kahealea’s perseverance is typical of all the members of the singing groups, who have received high praise for their accomplishments in 2014.

4.4.3.1.4 Pathway to Womanhood Productions: ‘Sapphires’

A description of the Worawa Arts program, including some productions, is available http://vimeo.com/83905939

‘Sapphires’ (2013), was an in-school production based on the play and musical of the same name. Selected students and teachers from Worawa and students from Scotch College took part in the production.

The video of the production attests to its success: http://vimeo.com/75139994

Learning in the Performing Arts is rigorous. Students must think for themselves and persevere if a performance is to eventuate. In speaking about the ‘Sapphires’ (2013) production Leigh says developing the production began by telling Aunty Lois’ story and watching the movie to generate excitement. She talked about how the girls could add their own story to this narrative by being part of the production. This tapped into their wish to be engaged at a contemporary level. Leigh notes the literacy and history outcomes achieved in rehearsals. All the girls learned about the personal historical context from Aunty Lois, and were surprised to hear of the difficulties she faced in the 1960’s. They also learned about the broader historical context from the play’s script.

The fact that Aunty Lois was there made it real. They shared talking about the story and shared the excitement; the movie stimulated their teenage selves. Culture or their teenage selves?
It is sometimes impossible to tell which is dominant or the difference. They were certainly engaged at the contemporary level.

English literacy was also a focus as girls read, learned and spoke lines. Presentation skills were also developed as the cast members approached the public performance. It was a consuming project but Leigh says:

The girls learnt 36 pages of script, understood it, used correct inflexion and could tell the 1960’s story. Not many other schools could have students doing that in three months. One step away from living it is acting it!

The production included ten songs and ten pieces of choreography, full costume and full staging. The effort required for learning and performing in this production is rigorous.

Leigh brought in an external colleague for auditions. They held auditions and took notes. While this was productive she describes it as hard and harsh and says she may not do it exactly that way again. Everyone who auditioned got into the production but not all had lead roles. As time progressed, a few dropped out and two were put out. Generally all adopted a rigorous approach but approximately three weeks out from the performance, they were experiencing difficulties, as happens in any production. With encouragement, using Leigh’s metaphor of the “Big Dipper” the girls, realising they had negotiated the uphill sections, persevered and the production was extremely successful. The “productive struggle” (Allen, 2012) which “leads to understanding, makes learning goals feel attainable and effort seem worthwhile, yields results, leads students to feelings of empowerment” is very evident here, as they all took responsibility for their part in the production with very satisfying and creditable results.

Most of the girls really enjoyed working with the boys from Scotch College. At first some found this a little daunting. They were surprised that the boys were
nervous and shy also. As the weeks progressed both the boys and the girls focussed on the tasks and skills and relationships became more relaxed. Teachers taking some on-stage roles in the production also enhanced collegiality and a sense of belonging to the Worawa College community.

Leigh believes that for one student in particular the production was exceptionally beneficial as she struggled with relationships and self esteem. This particular student had a lead role but because she had blue eyes and white skin, this became an issue for the other girls.

*It was out there and we dealt with it. She had to get on with the others as she was playing a relational role. She had some teenage tantrums but succeeded. The girl who started rehearsals was a totally different girl from the one at their conclusion.*

Another girl who had a leading role said the production changed her perception of herself. She said:

*If I can do this, I can do anything.*

She has just had her first solo art exhibition in Queensland.

Alliyanna, a student, when asked for some highlights of her time at Worawa said

*Taking part in the ‘Sapphires’ production last year- it was great fun and I really enjoyed it.*

4.4.3.1.4.1 Student Perspective

Kahealea, who also played one of the lead girls describes the process in some detail. She acknowledges the hard work:

*The ‘Sapphires' took a lot of rigour and patience. I wasn’t actually looking forward to performing it, because like in all honesty, because of all the practices. A lot was put on to us in those practices; you have to this, you have to do that - like exactly. But when I got out there it kinda all goes away and you just improvise – it comes naturally. You just think “I didn't really need to put in all that hard work”. But really you did.*
Kahealea reminisces about a mishap:

In ‘Sugar Pie Honey Bunch’, one singer skipped a verse and we finished like a minute before it was supposed to be finished. The band’s still playing and we’re standing there; we had finished our dance and we’re just smiling at the crowd.

The only aspect she found really difficult was wearing a wig:

One thing I did not like was the wigs, because the wigs were so big.

Kahealea says that overall the experience was rigorous and good:

It has given me patience and rigour – like a lot – because we had to sacrifice a lot of our time. We had to go to practices three times a week. The most significant practices were Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Friday practices were 3 hours and a whole day Saturday and a whole day Sunday. On top of that, there were music lessons – singing lessons with all of the other girls in the ‘Sapphires’.
She also describes the elation that follows successful completion:

> I reckon the best part about the ‘Sapphires’ was waking up the next morning and thinking, “Did I really do that last night? Did I really perform in front of all those people – and telling stories to your friends.

and the ensuing mixed emotions

> But when it is over you just think “Wow, that was hard work!” I’m glad it is over but it’s sad at the same time, as you spent so long with these people and you go very separate ways now, but I am also glad that now I have time to myself, I can just relax.

Kahealea says that other people kept her focused and cast members supported each other. They persevered:

> Because you had so many other people with you on the journey, practicing for the ‘Sapphires’. For the lead girls you kept each other going.

One of the greatest supports was:

> Having someone understand you are frustrated because you don’t have enough time for yourself, you can support each other and say, “It’s not long now”.

Support was reciprocal

> If one person was down and frustrated and their patience was running thin, someone would say “It’s ok” and when that person was down at that level, the other would be up. You just help each other, because it was a really long process.
Kahealea values the support of Leigh, her teacher:

*Just having that support – Leigh is a really supportive person. She kinda made sure we were doing ok; she understood “Yeh it’s taking a lot of your time”. She put in more time than we did. She had to organise the props, make up, hair, the band, the stage, script and be there with us. All we had to do was be there and say the lines but she had to be there all the way through.*

She also values the support of Rani, a teacher aide, who is very involved in Pathways to Womanhood activities.

4.4.3.2 Visual Art

Steve has taught art at Worawa Aboriginal College since 2008, except for the time spent on Groote Island in 2011. He says he has witnessed dramatic change since he first started in 2008. As well as the transition from a co-educational facility to an all girls’ school, he notes the increased organisation resulting in greater communication in all sectors of College life and the improved physical setting. He also says the girls are achieving in all ways, not only in art, which “just keeps getting better”, but also by excelling in sport and staged productions of ‘Sapphires’ and ‘Stylin’ Up With Worawa’. Steve cites the increased sales from the Worawa Art Gallery in 2012 and 2013, as well as the invitation to send paintings to be exhibited at the Aboriginal Gallery in Rotterdam, The Netherlands in 2014 as evidence of the improvement in art. All of this means Worawa “is like a real college community”. He also comments that the senior girls have:

*gone from unable to read or write their name four years ago, to standing up at assembly and reading a radio play.*

He understands that success in sport and artistic endeavours lead to an attitude of “I can do” rather than “I can’t” and this enables the girls to have confidence and achieve in other academic pursuits.

Learning in the art room is very obvious, even to the casual observer. Student work is evident in abundance and students are all focussed on their work. In discussing the learning journey of students, Steve comments on the reticence of individuals:

*When they first come in on the first day of the year, they barely poke their heads out of their hoodies – some of them.*

In order to commence the learning journey Steve just encourages the students to start with anything particularly if they are reluctant to sit still. He says:

*I never really think much of the first painting. I don’t care what it comes out like; it’s the process of sitting through and actually doing.*
Starting might involve scribbling on a page, drawing shapes or traditional symbols. He encourages the girls to use these and to take an idea from home, Worawa, the roads or the hills and create a symbol, in an effort to either tap into their culture or awaken a connection with culture, if they are unaware of it. When they commence to draw, the piece may be a very rough pencil drawing. Steve comments:

'It may be meant to be a fish but it looks like a lizard! I at least know it is a fish! Then I say, I will show you four or five ways to develop the fish.'

Steve develops relationships by talking about their family and community and asking questions about the girls’ knowledge of local artists. He also asks if they have painted in community. Some have and some have not.

By the end of term he finds students are:

*lined up at the door telling me lies, that they have been switched into this group just to get in here. When in here, they sit and create a ‘chilled out’ environment.*

Visitors to the art room notice the focus, intense concentration and production of really fine work. When asked the girls are able to explain the technique they are currently using. Steve says the girls increase their ability to concentrate over time and as they become interested in creating art works they have no desire to wander about the room. The ability to concentrate increases from forty to fifty to sixty minutes and he expresses the hope they may take this skill into other classes. Steve muses about students who come to Worawa who:

*have never done anything and what they have done is really babyish, and they start getting familiar with the tools, techniques and working out designs better. The result blows your head.*

He talks about this example in the light of the fifty canvases ready to go to The Netherlands. One of these is a product of one such student. The quality of the work on the fifty canvases is very high. The exhibition is the result of a visit to the art room by professionals from the gallery in Rotterdam. Steve predicts that many students in the class are the famous painters of the future.

*Painting is a contemporary thing, always moving on, it never stops and they are part of it.*


The Worawa Newsletter Term 3, 2014 speaks of this and the subsequent exhibition in New Zealand:

*This month also saw the closing of the “Sharing our Spirit” Exhibition in the Netherlands where Worawa students Art work was exhibited. This*
exhibition was a great success, with a number of pieces sold, creating a great deal of interest and receiving extremely positive feedback. The student’s ages range from 13 to 17 years old and they can now proudly call themselves ‘International Artists’. Student art was also on exhibition in New Zealand in a First Nations exhibition which featured Maori and Aboriginal art.

The clothes modelled at the fashion parade ‘Stylin’ Up with Worawa’ were the product of student artwork being translated to fabric at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). This fabric was made into garments by designers and modelled by students from Worawa and other partner schools. In order to commence this process Steve photographed different parts of student paintings and Aunty Lois picked some, which were sent to RMIT for consideration and subsequent use as designs on fabric.

Steve has a rigorous pedagogical approach. When students come to him and ask, “What do I do next?” he replies:

“Think” and “if you’re not sure what to think about you could think about this, and this, and this and then this’. Now you have something to think about.

The understanding that a rigorous approach is one that enables students to think for themselves (Allen, 2012) is evident here, as is the productive struggle (Allen, *ibid*). Steve expresses a very clear understanding of the learning process and its purpose of empowering students. He notes that as they get the confidence they need help to think and extend their designs. After this, they come to the stage of using their own pieces to start new pieces and so go into experimental mode, after developing the skills to do so. Surveying the term’s work displayed in the art room he exclaims:

*Look how many different styles and pieces are there.*
Relationships in the art room reflect the focus on producing art. Steve says:

They know everyone else is working hard and they are always trying to inspire. This creates an environment, like a big wave.

Respect is evident as there is never any fighting or pushing and shoving and no-one touches anyone else’s painting.

If a painting is on a table and they want to use the table they won’t move it—just work around it—an unspoken understanding of respect. Their work is a solo thing but all these people are doing the same thing and this creates a bigger environment with respect, rigour and relationship—they respect each other’s work.

Steve continues:

I have never put my things away and none of them have ever been pinched, broken, touched—nothing. They come and talk about my paintings but won’t touch. I don’t know how that has happened—I only remember saying ‘Hey, you don’t touch other people’s work’ twice in the time I’ve been here—I don’t come in and say, “These are the rules”. It is just unwritten. They feel comfortable and calm in the space, with me and with themselves. You often hear them comment on each other’s paintings, “That’s awesome!” And often hear—“Wow! Who’s done that?”

In addressing the students learning, Steve says he has the opportunity to talk individually to students, as it is their individual work he is trying to help them improve. The only time he addresses the whole class is for a housekeeping matter or to tell them of new resources available for use. He also says he is very open in discussing with them his understanding of the Aboriginal culture and he also talks about his family. He understands openness and honesty as paramount.

4.4.3.2.1 Student Perspectives

Hakira, who has been at Worawa for three years, says that when she first arrived she did not like art and knew nothing about canvases or paint. She acknowledges her creative development over the three years. When asked about her art, she says:

I do Indigenous contemporary.

and adds a note about the personal therapeutic value of art:

It is really relaxing and it takes your mind off everything because I was so stressed out this year and art has made me calmer. I was uncertain about schools for next year and I was really worried.
Hakira comes from an artistic family.

*My Nan and Mum and Aunty Yhonnie are all artists. My Aunty Yhonnie is more successful because she travels the world for her art. She is my inspiration. She does glass blowing; I learn a little bit but can’t do it.*

In speaking about preparation for the exhibition in Rotterdam, Hakira says:

*It was extremely stressful, I remember crying about it, because I was angry at Steve, because I didn’t think I had enough time to finish it but in the end it turned out all right.*

She elaborates, demonstrating the pain both physical and emotional, coupled with the knowledge that her efforts were worthwhile both personally and in the context of the project:

*It was a lot of planning – what can I say – a lot, a lot, a lot of rigour was put into my painting; and I was kinda sad to send it away. I wish I could keep it, because I put in so much effort, cos there was like a process. It took four or five months to complete the painting and there were times when my hands were so sore and I couldn’t move my thumb because the muscle was so sore. It took so long but it was all worth it in the end. I wish I could have kept it. I got it done just before it was due. I just wish I could have kept it but I knew where it was going to go.*

Here is evidence of a person’s struggle to reconcile the Aboriginal understanding of the deep intrinsic value of a work of art and the mainstream cultural focus on public recognition and economic gain. Operating in the “Third Space” (Jancz & Sumner, 2013) is not always easy.

Kahealea, who has also been at Worawa for three years says that when she first came she disliked art so much she avoided the classes. She says:

*I didn’t know how to paint. If you look at my first piece of art that is still in the art room and look at my pieces I’m doing now, you wouldn’t think it was the same person because I’ve developed new styles.*

Kahealea would like to keep her first painting when she leaves as a reminder of the magnitude of her journey. She too sent a canvas to Rotterdam.

When asked how Steve her teacher assists her, she outlines the same procedure as he describes. She says:

*He just says, ‘Keep practising’. When I did my first ever, good painting, I then took that idea and put it on to other canvases and developed a style and started experimenting with other styles.*
Kahealea says she has selected Studio Arts for VCE:

*I am kinda nervous about it, because in Unit 1 it’s more the theory side; the teacher teaches you new techniques – how to draw and stuff and I’m not a drawer but in Unit 2 it’s more the stuff we do here at Worawa.*

Hakira, who has not as yet selected subjects for VCE, says:

*Hopefully I will do it. I want to do it in university.*

It is clear that for both Kahealea and Hakira the Worawa program has led to this inspiration.

Kahealea and Hakira’s experiences reflect Jeanneret’s (2004), understanding that the Arts are ‘able to provide children with unique and multiple ways of exploring, forming, expressing, communicating and understanding their own and others ideas and feelings’ (p.4). This also demonstrates that students in the Arts are also encouraged to ‘have a go’ at learning and so they are not afraid to make mistakes (Crowe, 2006a) but learn from these.

4.4.3.2.2 Pathways to Womanhood: ‘Stylin’ Up with Worawa’

‘Stylin’ Up with Worawa’ (2012), a fashion parade, was the culmination of a process in which art designs by Worawa College students were translated to fabric by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), made into garments which were modeled by Worawa students.

http://vimeo.com/83905939
Leigh describes ‘Stylin’ Up with Worawa’ as a simpler production than ‘Sapphires’, as it had a single focus. She says:

*It tapped into the girls’ teenage angst about body image.*
*It was challenging but gave us the opportunity to speak about body image and wellbeing.*

Aunty Lois, realising the delicacy of such a venture, stipulated that girls could choose the role they played. Not all wished to model on the catwalk but no girl wishing to model was prevented from having a chance to do so. Girls, who wished to do so, could take part by painting, designing, assisting in lifting the designs and making the fabric.

It was a rigorous process, as the girls had to be at regular rehearsals and the performance and wear clothes they had not necessarily chosen to wear. Generally they were proud to show off their friends’ work. Leigh, Lois and Rani were responsible for training the models. Leigh comments:

*There were more wellbeing outcomes in this production than literacy ones.*

Rani in her interview elaborates on the training of the models. She says that when Aunty Lois first suggested this idea of a fashion parade her response was:

*“We can’t do that” and Lois said, “We will try”.*

Rani began by teaching the girls modelling techniques, which she acknowledges to be quite difficult.

*Ten girls were selected initially and this number quickly dropped to eight and then six. Two younger girls however hung about the group and learnt everything.*
Once again it is evident that with the assistance of the teachers and significant support staff, the girls gained confidence and they joined with Aboriginal students from partner schools to present a very creditable performance, enjoyed by a public audience. Boys from Scotch College made a presentation to each model at the conclusion of the parade. The video of the production attests to its success:

http://vimeo.com/48857632
4.4.3.2.1 Deadly Awards

The following report is taken from Worawa College Facebook Page of October 1st, 2012:

Worawa Aboriginal College was awarded a prestigious Deadly Dressed Award for their wearable art and modeling performance at ‘The Deadly’s at the Sydney Opera House on September 25th. As the world watched, our students presented their stunning garments and showcased their unique and beautiful artwork. The colours, designs and depth of story in the garments stunned judges and fellow competitors. Other designers and managers were amazed at the poise of our beautiful young models. Jessica Mauboy, Debra Mailman, Casey Donovan and Troy Cassar-Daley were among the many famous faces at the Deadly’s this year. Our students walked the red carpet alongside these well-known Deadly winners. Nine months ago, Lois Peeler, the Executive Director of Worawa came up with the idea to create garments out of the girl’s art and then, to train them to model these creations. Ms Peeler was an original ‘Sapphire’ and the first Aboriginal model and ‘Stylin’ Up With Worawa,’ is her event to showcase these talents and skills. This challenging task brought together art teachers, modeling coaches, fashion and textile designers, hair stylists, make-up artists, educators and many others who worked tirelessly to ensure the event would be a huge success. On August 24th the students modeled the garments like professionals, showcasing the excellent art and exquisite jewellery and enjoying their moment. The audience response was beyond expectation with many serious requests to purchase the fabric and garments. Deadly’s officials saw a clip of this event and invited Worawa to enter the awards.

[Image of Worawa students posing at the Deadly Awards]

Link to: Section 3: Literature Review: Learning in and through the Arts
4.4.4 Language

Worawa students from more remote areas speak a number of Aboriginal languages. These are not discouraged or suppressed but shared, celebrated and harnessed to improve students’ literacy, learning and creative cultural expression. Student’s first language is the basis for enhanced learning of Australian English literacy. (Worawa Aboriginal College Education and Culture p. 2)

The key focus of the Languages Learning Centre is the learning and teaching of English. Research confirms the importance of recognising and utilising a student’s first language in the learning and teaching of a second language (Purdie, 2009; Grimes, 2009; Devlin, 2009 & 2011; Graham & Gale, 2011; Lee, 2012; Timor, 2012; Ferlazzo and Hull-Sypnieski, 2014; Gale, 2014)

Worawa Aboriginal College acknowledges the richness and diversity of student languages and the importance of cultural pride and strength that comes from valuing languages in the academic program. In this manner it is similar in many respects to the VCE Study Design, Indigenous Languages of Victoria: Revival and Reclamation (VCCA, 2013) and continues the tradition of revival and reclamation initiatives of the founder Hyllus Maris and her family. Personalised learning and students groups are developed according to their achievement level and needs of the students. Within the Language Learning Centre, students work together in their first language to develop reading and writing skills to enhance English literacy.

4.4.4.1 Importance of First Language

Worawa Aboriginal College, acknowledges the richness and diversity of students’ languages, and also recognises the cultural pride and strength that comes from valuing these languages in the academic program. Students at the College are representative of approximately 25 different language groups, with some students speaking up to three or four different languages or dialects, whilst others may only know a few words. The Languages Program Outline is in Appendix 35.

Language is part of the intervention program for girls who have low-level English Literacy. Kathryn, who previously worked in bi-lingual education in the Northern Territory and Sally, who worked in community schools in the South Australia work with a small group of students as part of a first language literacy program. The languages currently represented in this program are Luritja/Pintupi, Warlpiri, Yankunytjatjara, Murrinh Patha, Kriol, Djambarrpuyngu and Anmatjerre.

Each week, the girls work together in their language groups on language enrichment activities. They have the opportunity to produce resources, or to research and learn more about their languages. They also participate in Yorta Yorta and Woiwarrung lessons with Aunty Zeta Thomson, as part of their Aboriginal Culture classes.

Aboriginal Elder Nancy Djambutj from Milingimbi stated:

*I believe that strong language means strong learning and that means*
strong culture. I want all Aboriginal children to have strong language, strong learning and strong culture and to feel proud and confident about who they are as Aboriginal people.

The approach taken at the College reflects the understanding of the benefits of teaching a student’s first language and using this to develop skills in English, expressed in the writing of Devlin (2011), when he applauds the value in arranging a well-organised bilingual-biliteracy program. The program further draws on Grimes (2009), who claims that extensive research both within and without Australia demonstrates overwhelmingly, that bilingualism enables the comprehension of multiple perspectives which are beyond the comprehension of monolingualistic people, as well as Gale’s (2014) extensive experience in bilingual education.

Worawa Aboriginal College recognises all languages spoken by the students and encourages the girls to use their first language while at school. In this way the College values “the knowledge ………each individual brings to the learning situation” (Hooley, 2009, p. 69).

The College enrolment form has English as a ‘Second Language’ (ESL), or EAL/D identification, the identification of their community and first language, as well as the opportunity to identify a second and third language. This information is to the forefront so all teachers know these details. The ready accessibility of the information from the enrolment form assists teachers to understand the number of languages spoken by their students and on a day-to-day basis, to better understand tensions in the classroom, particularly if the girls are using different languages to express frustration. Once identified, the strengths the girls bring to school can be used within the school program.

Language and culture are inextricably entwined and Kathryn confirms the College understanding of this when she says:

*Recognition of language is recognition of culture and a recognition of the strengths that students bring with them to school.*

In her classes, Sally encourages the shared understanding of words from different languages and she notes the enjoyment of the girls as they come to learn and use words from different languages. In addition, some girls become interested in building banks of words from their language. Sometimes in the translation of English words there appears to be no direct equivalent and Sally says:

*When this occurs my language skills are not strong enough to be definite about appropriate meanings but we can check with the community and see if there is such a word.*

Resources such as language dictionaries and language books are available but these are insufficient given the breadth of relevant languages, so the relationship with the communities becomes extremely important. Worawa staff members have visited the girls’ home communities, a fact much appreciated by the parents. One parent commented:
Some of the teachers have been to community; they’ve seen and they can comfort our children here.

Kathryn comments on the translation of the recognition of the fundamental importance of acknowledging languages in the College:

The students are free to speak in their language wherever, and whenever they like; whilst those who come without an Aboriginal language often learn from those who do. It is heartening to see some of the young students who have grown up speaking English, learning some of the languages of the other students.

Both Kathryn and Sally note that the girls develop a sense of responsibility to maintain their language. Those who have language can see how those students who have lost language, feel about this and so they become proud of their own knowledge. Those from urban communities, who do not know their language, are assisted on an individual basis to research it. These students work together in their language groups for one lesson a week to research and extend their skills. Parents, who attended the Community Forum in 2014, supported this learning. They spoke of their desire for their children to learn the “sleeping languages” of their communities and to learn the “living languages” of each other (Appendix 16).

4.4.4.1.1 First language supports the learning of a second language

Kathryn and Sally articulate the power and importance of first language literacy. Kathryn maintains that in any bilingual, bicultural or two-way program, students who are introduced to books and literacy in their own language quickly learn the logical and consistent representation of sound symbols on the page. They then become literate more easily in English. Kathryn states:

It is the most logical thing in the world if you are going to teach a child about books and literacy, that you use their first language. If they come to us in Year 7 without an understanding of literacy, it is logical to go back to their first language. The phonetic consistency makes it easy for them.

The ability to read in their first language gives the girls confidence and builds a sense of pride. Kathryn observes that this realisation often takes the girls by surprise.

4.4.4.2 Pedagogy and assessment

Sally values a welcoming space in which students can learn, have their work displayed and share their achievements as individuals. She understands this type of space enables relationship building and the development of responsibility, as the girls care for the space and keep it neat and tidy. Small numbers in the classes also assist the development of meaningful relationships, as time can be spent with each
student. The girls have their own tubs in the room and there is a reading space furnished with a sofa and chairs. There is plenty of natural light and the girls can see the outside natural environment. The large glass windows mean that Sally can have groups outside. This setting enabled her to introduce Drop Everything and Read, very successfully, as the space is conducive to this activity. Drop Everything and Read is part of the whole school reading program, observed by all classes for ten minutes after lunch.

Being read to and so enjoying books, prepares students for reading independently. Sally says.

*I read to the kids as I loved being read to as a child and I want them to know beautiful stories and pictures. In my experience kids in remote communities may miss out on this as they are not often read to at home.*

Often the girls are orally fluent but find reading and writing difficult. Sally has strategies to engage these students. They require material using graphics and very little text (Appendix 27). She is encouraged when material covered in lessons is obvious in the girls’ writing. For example:

*We did a lot of work on nouns this term and it is coming up in their writing – which is great.*

Sally encourages them to read for enjoyment and they respond to this. She also uses small white boards the use of which encourages the girls to take risks, because they can easily erase and re-organise their writing. Two or three times a week they have time for free writing, using prompts she provides if they wish. During the term Sally noticed some had gone from writing three words to writing three sentences and that their sentence structure had improved. The productive struggle (Allen, 2012) is evident here. Sally agrees with the definition that such a struggle “leads to understanding, makes learning goals feel attainable and effort seem worthwhile, yields results, leads students to feelings of empowerment and creates a sense of hope” (p. 3) but adds “and achievement”. This is congruent with her understanding of responsibility for learning as she says to the girls:

*We are here to help you learn. It is your job to get there.*

Response to these statements is more often governed by maturity as the older ones respond more positively than the younger ones. Sally warns of simplistically relating problems caused by lack of maturity, to culture. Goal setting is also important so the girls become responsible for where they wish to go with their learning. This is easier to achieve as students become older, as is evident in any student, not only Aboriginal students.

Through observation and assessment of the girls’ achievements Sally is able to differentiate learning. Formative assessment through discussion is her preferred mode of assessment, as any tests must necessarily be guided because of literacy constraints. Observation across a range of relevant tasks is obviously her main modus operandi as she is able to discuss the growth of each learner in the context of these. Reading
records, spelling and sight words provide context for the assessment of those who are at the lower levels. The use of words in their speaking and writing is an important indicator of progress, as is the transference of skills from one to another area of learning.

As well as the students allocated to Sally’s class, there are four or five other girls, literate in English, who come into the room in their free time just to read the Warlpiri readers. Sally sees this as an indication of their engagement and like Kathryn, sees the value of the inclusion of first language as part of the general program.

It is evident on many levels that the goal of supporting Indigenous languages in schools (Office of the Arts, 2009) is being achieved at Worawa Aboriginal College. There is also evidence that using the girls’ first language to teach English does not inhibit progress in the acquisition of English (Reading, 1975; Yunipungu, 1999; Purdie, 2009) but rather accelerates progress. It is commonly understood that students will never surpass literacy levels in the second language if they are not achieved in the first. Structuring the program in this way for girls who require intervention involves approaches beyond the reductionist to the comprehensive, giving opportunities to enjoy stories and to read a variety of literature as advised by Hatch (2009). The voluntary involvement of girls in other classes with the Warlpiri readers demonstrates student interest in their languages. A formal ‘Languages’ class each week supports their interest.

4.4.4.3 Teaching English

The English program is based on the Australian Curriculum, English Curriculum (ACARA, 2012).

High expectations are evident in Raelene’s approach to teaching English. She stresses the importance of knowing your students in order to develop a relationship with each one, as learning occurs in the context of relationships and that it is the
knowledge about each student as a person, that enables scaffolding and differentiation of learning so each girl experiences growth. The approach reflects that of Tomlinson (2010) in that the strengths and interests of each girl are identified and utilized in the learning process. In discussion of productive and destructive struggles (Allen, 2012) Raelene understands some frustration to be good and identifies this as “productive frustration” as this leads to positive change and is part of capacity building in her students.

In support of high expectations Raelene who teaches English, articulates the importance of the physical setting, in that it must reflect order. She says:

_The girls like order, they like surprises too but they like order._

The girls are expected to leave the room in the condition in which they found it and so tidying up before they leave is one of her high expectations for her students. Raelene provides an explicit link to the Responsibility and Rigour elements of The Worawa Way:

_I won’t do for them what they can do for themselves. It takes time. I’ll help and encourage them; they have to get beyond the “I can’t be bothered”. That is responsibility and rigour; all comes back to the four core values of the Worawa Way._

Many students at Worawa lack exposure to a variety of books. Raelene notes that there are children from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds in this position and it is important not to see this as a trait of Aboriginal students in isolation. It is therefore, important to find texts that engage students. In order to encourage all readers, Worawa has pop-up books, comic books, graphic novels, non-fiction and fiction including romance novels. The use of audio books has also been explored. This year the senior students studied _The Secret Life of Walter Mitty_ by James Thurber, which Raelene deemed particularly relevant because of the recent film. According to Raelene, the _The Secret Life of Walter Mitty_ and the writing of James Joyce “opened up such diverse worlds for the girls”.

Relevance leads to purpose. One girl who found purpose this year, did so because she needs to read to succeed in her chosen pathway after school. Raelene says:

_we accept her exactly where she is, encourage her to move forward with no criticism and this makes the difference. It is the relationship that is important, accepting the student where she is and helping her to move forward._

Sometimes the teacher needs to directly intervene. A student who was at a pre-primary reading level was asked if she wanted help with her reading; there was relief in her face because someone had diagnosed the problem. The subsequent personalised program enabled her to read to an adult every day, resulting in increased confidence and skill.

Raelene articulates her goal of empowering students to have “the strength to make choices that are right for them”. In previous years it was supposed that the girls
only read because they were expected to read but this attitude is changing, as there are numbers of students borrowing books regularly from the College library and reading them. They are also engaged in reading during ‘Drop Everything and Read’ (DEAR) time each day and this would not have been a possibility previously. There are obvious improvements in student reading levels over time, for example one student has improved by four reading year levels in less than nine months and others have done similarly (Assessment Data, Appendix 28). In one case the girl who did not read in class improved so much that she is reading to others outside class. In addition the house parents report student interest in doing homework in the Houses in the evenings, including Friday. Reading is part of homework activity.

While the above is encouraging, Raelene is aware of the motivation some times being unhealthy, when she says that some girls, who read a great deal, may use this to avoid interaction with others. She also notes that anti-social or attention-seeking behaviour may hide a girl’s inability to read or write. In this case they are choosing an easier path rather than one resulting from being identified as unable to read and write. Raelene is adamant that students must write every day. She attributes this conviction to her Prep to Year 12 teaching experience, which has given her an extremely good understanding of the developmental process of writing. Some days it may be appropriate for them to read only but overall there must be a balance of reading and writing.

Among the girls there are many levels of achievement in writing but all are celebrated appropriately. Those with a lower reading level may manage only one page of writing but their achievements are celebrated as much as the achievements of the senior class students. One student proudly announced after completing an 800 word essay that last year she could not have written 30 words. Raelene understands that increased ability to write not only encompasses numbers of words but the ability to edit effectively. She has many strategies she encourages students to use for these purposes. These include the identification and inclusion of persuasive techniques. In elaborating on this process, Raelene is confident of the benefit of exposure to correct language and terminology. She uses colour and cut and paste techniques to make interesting models for the classroom.

Relevance leads to rigour and the consequent ability of the students to think for themselves. The senior class members wrote pieces using Duty versus Desire, a theme from James Joyce’s writing to develop their own perspective. The student pieces include great diversity of interpretation from a love story to ‘I stole a car but I didn’t want to, I was made to’. Some of the student work in this unit was of a very high standard. ‘Teenagers don’t like soft drink’ and ‘Should January 26th be called Australia Day?’ are other relevant topics for persuasive writing. In responding to ‘Should January 26th be called Australia day?’ an EAL/D student made posters with speech bubbles to give reasons, a middle student wrote 450 words for the first time, while the seniors wrote 700 words fully published between Monday and Friday. Thus there is a range of achievement, the highest of which equates to an A at Year 10. The senior students are all preparing to do VCE in other schools and a number are actively looking for schools to attend to complete Years 11 & 12. They consistently ask Raelene for confirmation that they are receiving “real Year 10 tasks”. The ability to work independently will be important in their future pathways and so Raelene is
concentrating on fostering independence in her senior students, by encouraging them to write a first draft without consulting an adult.

At the time of interview Raelene said the students were looking forward to the *The God’s of Wheat Street* (Unit, Appendix 9; Assessment Task, Appendix 29). The Worawa Newsletter, Term 3, 2014, has an account of student learning and achievement when studying this mini series. Raelene writes:

Students in Blue Group studied the mini-series “The Gods of Wheat Street”, starring a predominantly Aboriginal cast. The series follows the life of a family and explores many issues found in small country towns, and attitudes—good and bad—towards Aboriginal people. Students were asked to speak about the Worawa Way – Relationships, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour - in the voice of one of the characters.

Students spoke for two minutes as the character, reflecting on lives and events in the story. Andrea was especially excited by her presentation – as were the class. It was as if Libby had entered the room! All students are to be commended for their work, as every one of them achieved a passing grade at a Year 10 level. A number of students commented that this was the first task they had passed in English, and for some it was the first time they had achieved an A grading. Congratulations Blue class.

At the beginning of 2014 the senior students wrote letters (Appendix 30) to Aunty Lois, the purpose of which was to give their reasons for returning to Worawa. They expressed appreciation for Aunty Lois and their learning at Worawa. They also outlined their future ambitions. Raelene was emotionally affected by their sentiments but also commented that they demonstrated “some pretty solid writing”. The letters demonstrated appropriate vocabulary, sentence structure and paragraphing in the context of heart-felt gratitude.

Kahealea wrote:

*I still remember my first year at Worawa. I was a scared little girl who thought breaking things, swearing and being disrespectful was cool. It took me sometime to learn the right way: The Worawa Way. So I have been asked why I have returned to Worawa, and well I don’t think I could reply with a good enough reason. But the answer would be the care, love and respect everyone has for you, even though they may not know you they still manage to smile at you. I have also returned because of the change Worawa has brought upon me. I am proud of myself for returning. I am also proud to call myself a Worawa student. I have returned to Worawa because I am proud to be Aboriginal and it has taken me a while to feel like that.*

She continues:

*This year I would like to achieve the confidence to speak about myself and my culture in public. I would also like to maintain a healthy strong relationships with each of my peers. I would also*
like to learn more about my culture so I have some understanding of where I come from.

Next year I have the ambition of attending _________ College...
My ambitions for the future would be to complete University and study Law.............After University I would like to become a lawyer because I believe in justice.

Kahealea, who has been at Worawa for three years, described her improvement in academic learning in her interview:

When I started in Year 7 at Worawa my reading level was about Year 5. Now it is where it should be.

She attributes this improvement to small classes and the reception of increased assistance from teachers. Previously Kahealea had been in a mainstream school. She expresses her wish to improve in mathematics and spelling before the end of the year and her progression to another school for VCE studies. Kahealea speaks of the rigour required for her to persevere in a boarding school:

First, at the end of each week, I just wanted to go home. There were some horrible times for me but here I am completing Year 10 in my third year.

In her interview Kahealea reinforced the sentiments expressed in her letter when speaking about her growth emotionally and socially. She described herself as “a disrespectful and immature girl” who had become “open-hearted”.

Alliyanna says English is one of her favourite subjects in which she has improved a great deal

I was really low but now I’m much higher. When Raelene came.
I learned a lot.

Maxine when discussing her move into the Blue group says:

At first it was pretty hard but now it is easier – more understandable.

She is proud of her achievement in the assignment on Gods of Wheat Street.

Jaden too enjoys Gods of Wheat Street and says:

I don’t think we would have done that in another school.
It was Aboriginal and I related to it. The characters – we knew people like that.

She adds that you know you are learning when you achieve your goals and when:

You learn new things – things you didn’t know before
Andrea spoke about liking harder books, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Imaginative writing engages her and she presented one of her stories at the Presentation of Awards ceremony in 2014 ([https://vimeo.com/117754817](https://vimeo.com/117754817)). A copy of her story is in the Worawa Year Book, 2014. Andrea sets her goals and often achieves beyond these. She understands relational learning as important and says:

> When I am not learning well I have my head down and I won’t listen to anyone. I know I’m learning well because I smile and laugh when I’m doing my work and with all the other girls we ask each other questions and stuff.

All facets of learning in English are understood to be important by Jamira:

> I have learned to get my head into a book – reading is so important and being able to write long stories and essays and tests and creating all types of things on computers.

Sasha for whom English is not her first language, says she knows she is learning:

> If I’m concentrating, listening and reading books.

Sometimes Sasha finds it hard to speak English all day; at times she mentally translates English words and statements into her preferred language, in order to enhance her understanding.

In a report to the Worawa Academic Reference Group (WARG) in March 2014 Kathryn, Head of Learning and Teaching, supplied some indicators of the improvement in the student learning environment and achievement since 2013. She asked the teachers to supply examples. Those directly relating to English included:

- Students borrowing books regularly from the College library and reading them
- Students engaging in reading during ‘Drop Everything And Read’ (DEAR) time each day.
- Significant improvements in student Reading levels over time, for example one student has progressed four reading year levels in less than nine months. Others have done similarly.
- The amount of writing that students are completing. One student proudly announced this week after completing an 800 word, essay, that last year she could not have written 30 words.

In addition, the student interest in doing homework in the Houses in the evenings, including Friday is a significant improvement. Each student now has homework folders for each subject and they are enjoying reading.

Sheryl, a parent interviewed in 2014 expressed her appreciation of the learning at Worawa. Speaking of her daughter, she said:

> She rang me and said “I’m on my third book, a book this big (Sheryl’s gesture denotes a large volume). I’m totally enjoying this series of the books”. At home she would never read. Her vocabulary is changing; she is learning different words.
4.4.5 Mathematics

The learning of the “language of maths” is essential for all students. The study of mathematics is foundational to participation in vocational and higher education and training. The Worawa program provides both a Value-Added Program including core mathematical skills and preparation for participation in post-compulsory years of schooling mathematics courses. Online programs such as ‘Mathletics’ reinforce key skills and understanding while challenging the students to achieve. The Mathematics program is based on the Australian Curriculum Mathematics Curriculum (ACARA, 2012). Student achievement is recorded in Appendix 38.

Two teachers, Dean and Sally, collaborate in the Mathematics Learning Centre to teach the five learning groups. Dean, who began teaching at Worawa in 2014 coordinates the Mathematics program.

Dean, as do Sally and Raelene, stresses the importance of the physical learning space. He understands that the room needs to be an inviting place, with the temperature optimal for learning. Quiet music assists learning as it lowers the heart rate and he has introduced his students to singer, songwriter material suitable for this purpose. The music Dean chooses is also culturally appropriate and so relevant for the girls. He sees this as a way to assist students to celebrate their culture. Adequate hydration is also paramount for them as this enables the brain to function more efficiently. Mathematical equipment is displayed in the room. Dean and other staff members have undertaken an inventory of the resources, grouping them so they can be easily accessible, as required. Laptops are available in the room for ready access.

There are relatively few girls reluctant to come to Mathematics classes, a fact that initially surprised Dean. He expected resistance, as some confide that they “hated maths” in their previous educational setting. While many operate at a low level, they participate and achieve. Dean assists the girls to recognise and celebrate their achievements in mathematics. Literacy is problematic as questions can confuse EAL/D learners. In order to assist the girls Dean uses their proficiency in simple Mathematics to improve their literacy. He does this by structuring appropriate questions for their level of literacy, as well as using simply worded commercially available resources. The girls are also encouraged to:

- assist each other with explanations and challenging questions,
- to listen to each other and participate in lessons.

Dean has high expectations for his students and this year the College has introduced ‘Mathletics’, a computer program in which the girls compete to get points. Their rewards are gold, silver and bronze certificates. Dean sets the level, which may be quite low for a start and this is increased as appropriate. In one term he increased one level and comments that in other schools in which he has taught, the increase
would be one level per year. While these girls have started at a lower level they have moved at a greater rate. Any girl gaining 1000 points receives a certificate and Dean says:

*consequently they are very happy and work tirelessly in free time, lunchtime and after school. The question is always “Can I do ‘Mathletics’?”*

He understands engagement and participation during class time is often an indicator of learning. Neat work and completion of homework are also expectations Dean has for the students. Students who do not complete their homework provide a challenge for him, as he endeavours to motivate them to do so.

Sally, in relation to ‘Mathletics’ says:

*The students are really into it. They would rather keep going than have 10 minutes, free time. Those with low literacy in English and Maths are getting certificates.*

In September 2014, Worawa Aboriginal College received a certificate ranking the College third for participation in the ‘Mathletics’ program. Sheryl, a parent, says her daughter has reported improvement in Mathematics and has 10 certificates, earned during ‘Mathletics’. She expresses surprise that:

*She always hated maths with a passion! Something that she hates she has an award for!*

Dean understands that he and Sally have changed the approach to teaching Mathematics at Worawa. Rather than using a set number of worksheets to be completed at each lesson, after which students have free time in which to do tasks other than mathematics, they ensure the girls always have mathematics tasks to complete. Some of these are completed with the help of Rani and Margaret who assist in some classes. As a result the girls have progressed. Some who counted on fingers and used lengthy addition processes have been assisted to use alternative methods. Dean acknowledges the work of Rani, a teacher aide and Margaret, a regular volunteer from the local community, in assisting him to develop a learning community in the classroom. Now students who may only have spent 15 minutes on mathematics tasks previously, are always engaged in and focussed on mathematical learning tasks that are appropriate for their level of achievement. All are engaged for all of the time. Dean says this has been achieved by:

*Maximising learning during class time and minimising free time or play time.*

Sally spoke at length about engagement of students. She said as response to a difficult timetabling arrangement she was “forced” to build interactive engaging curriculum. Sally used computers and interactive television to implement a hands-on learning environment with students of very low literacy skills. She says:

*I had to challenge myself to be more creative in the way I*
delivered the curriculum and they have come on in leaps and bounds. It’s been so successful because I’ve been more interactive, I’ve made it more engaging and I’ve worked hard on those things. It helps them grasp the concepts. It (the timetable) made me do it every lesson and made me think about how these kids are going to be engaged.

Sally’s experience of the success of her hands-on approach to learning is congruent with Yunkaporta’s (2009) eight ways of learning in the Indigenous context and also Santoro’s (2011) understanding that drawing on the informal, experiential learning experiences of Aboriginal children in community is the best way to formulate pedagogical approaches in the classroom.

Dean also reflects on his pedagogical approach. He does not feel as if he has achieved the implementation of a model of two-way learning yet but is working towards this. His progress seems solid as he says:

This week I had three different maths classes, teaching essentially the same concepts, but trying to pitch it to that right level where I had the appropriate resources, appropriate levels of literacy, the appropriate examples for an Algebra class and I think I pitched each at the right level. This is something I will continue to work on and gradually introduce the Indigenous component, particularly words from the girls’ first language. They will then be able to use their first language to understand maths concepts.

To assist him, Dean would like to have more support in the classroom from an experienced EAL/D specialist.

Dean’s understanding of his journey so far and the pathway he needs to follow is congruent with the writing of Matthews, Howard and Perry (2008). They
stress the importance of positive relationships and the context of the Aboriginal student, as paramount for the development of valid curriculum. Dean is also very aware of the potential of the Golden Ratio (Morris & Matthews, 2011) to link mathematics to the environment, science and artistic works, and so making important connections for Aboriginal students.

Dean’s ability to develop relevant learning activities is demonstrated by his entry in The Worawa Newsletter Term 3, 2014, describing learning in ‘Location and Transformation:

Students developed their vocabulary of following and giving directions in relation to both their home communities and the Worawa community. They enjoyed showing Google maps of their home community to other students in the class and identifying key landmarks within each community. This was a great opportunity for students to share knowledge with other students and to appreciate the similarities and difference between communities.

Students also learned about how shapes can be rotated, reflected, translated and enlarged and what these transformations do to the properties of the original shape. One activity, which the students really enjoyed, was completing the picture. In this activity one half of successively more challenging shapes were drawn on the board and students were invited up to complete the picture by drawing the other half.

Students also looked at symmetry within some paintings by Aboriginal artists from the central desert region of Australia. Older students progressed to learning about straight-line equations and their graphs. This included using GeoGebra software to plot and compare straight-line equations using technology.

At the beginning of 2014 the senior students wrote letters (Appendix 30) to Aunty Lois, the purpose of which was to give their reasons for returning to Worawa. They expressed appreciation for Aunty Lois and their learning at Worawa. They also outlined their future ambitions. Hakira when writing to Aunty Lois at the beginning of 2014, articulated improvement in mathematics as a goal:

For this year I want to achieve so many different outcomes, for example getting better at maths.

Personal responsibility for this is acknowledged when she writes:

Pushing myself this year will be the best for me.

Maxine in her letter also named mathematics as an area in which she wants to improve. Kahealea also mentioned this goal in her interview.

Jamira says the subject she has improved in the most is Mathematics and Sasha says:

Back home I didn’t like maths but here, it got better.
She says ‘Mathletics’ and Dean’s explanations are the catalysts.

Maxine says:

*sometimes maths can be easy and sometimes difficult to understand.*

She knows she is learning well if she receives a merit certificate. Jaden knows she is learning because:

*In maths we have a test and we have a number and each term you get a higher number.*

**Link to:** Section 3: Literature Review: Mathematics and Numeracy, pages 101-103  
Section 8: Appendices: 36 & 37

### 4.4.6 Science

Worawa is situated on 65 hectares of land of great beauty and of significant cultural importance. Nestled at the foot of the Great Dividing Range, the property has river frontage and natural bush land. This provides the backdrop to the Science program, which delivers age appropriate and essential standards for the future study of biology, chemistry, earth sciences, physics and environmental studies. Organisations such as Parks Victoria, the Bureau of Meteorology and the Australian Academy of Science resources are utilised to enable the Worawa program to be stimulating and relevant to all students.

In partnership with the Healesville Sanctuary, the establishment of a koala feed plantation on Worawa land has seen the planting of five hectares of 10,000 eucalyptus trees to support the needs of koalas at Healesville Sanctuary. The Koala Browse forms part of the College’s Science program with opportunity for students to participate in maintenance, plantation harvesting and feeding the koalas.

The College engaged with the Bureau of meteorology to establish an Indigenous Weather Station at Worawa.

Student engagement in Science is evident through specific projects, relevant curriculum and student understanding. The Worawa Newsletter, Term 3, 2012, describes students working under the guidance of mentor scientists from the Gene Technology Access Centre. This took place on a Forensic Science Excursion:

Our students solved a murder investigation by looking at trace evidence collected by the Victorian Police Crime Scene Division. Students used blood typing computer simulations to identify how blood types are inherited. Students identified the blood types of the suspects by recording whether the blood clumped in the presence of antibodies. This enabled the students to eliminate some of the suspects. Then the girls used the gel electrophoresis to determine the size of DNA fragments found in the check cells of the suspects. After completing the DNA analysis the students found a match from the blood found at the crime scene to that of the victim’s. They then used
DNA profiles to place a suspect, establish the identity of the victim and the paternity of a child involved. They cracked the case!

The Worawa Newsletter, Newsletter, Term 3, 2014, also reports on ongoing learning in Science:

In Science this term, the students have explored the classifications of living things from both an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspective. They looked at the classifications of food, animals, medicine and tool making. They were surprised by the discovery that the Dingo is now classified by non-Aboriginal people as its own "species" rather than a breed of dog.

The students have also explored the circulatory system of the human body, focusing especially on the heart. They investigated how the heart works, pumping blood through the body. This required the students to participate in the dissection of a sheep’s heart. They learned many new scientific skills including how to use; a surgeon’s scalpel, forceps and correct hygienic techniques when handling specimens. The experience was captured on video and in photos.

The science laboratory at the College is a place of interest for the students. There are many large coloured posters relevant to learning on the walls as well as newspaper articles. Rani, a teacher aide, says the girls are very interested in the visual material and rather than go out at the end of the lesson, they stay and look at the posters and articles in the laboratory.

Sasha, a student who likes science, when asked, “What helps you learn in Science?” says:
Listening to the teacher
Experiments: We went down to the dam to get dirty water and we had papers in the bottle and from dirty water it went to clean water. The filter was sand and rocks. It takes a while to get clean water as it goes slowly.

A teacher spoke of a particular student’s achievement in Science:

She walked around the College showing anyone she could find, her Science assignment with an ‘A’ on it – the first ‘A’ she had EVER received. She rang her parents last night to tell them the good news.

In November 2014 three students attended the ‘Residential Indigenous Science Experience’ (RISE) camp at Melbourne University. The residential camp is organised by the Gene Technology Access Centre (GTAC) in conjunction with Melbourne University’s Trinity College and aims to “inspire students about the exciting and rewarding careers that can eventuate from studying maths and science”. Participants attended a variety of workshops and presentations on chemistry, geology, genetics, physics and mathematics. During the week students also visited the Australian Synchotron, VicRoads Traffic control and the Scienceworks Museum.

The College’s annual camp to Phillip Island provided excellent links to explore within Science. Whilst on the camp students enjoyed exploring the variety of life along the beach and in the rock pools adjacent to the campsite. Students along with the Science teacher took hundreds of photos of creatures and objects that they found interesting. Back at school, students completed a project on a selected sea creature by collecting and presenting information on classification, habitat and exploring the relationships between the selected creatures. The students’ work has made for an excellent display alongside some of the photos taken at the camp.

Link to: Section 3: Literature Review: Science Education, pages 103-104
4.4.7 *Technology Across The Curriculum*

Information Technology is available across all Learning Centres and is the focus of specific projects.

4.4.7.1 *Learning with Technology*

The Media Project involved a small group of girls, under the direction of David Callow, a noted professional photographer. Staff member, Sinead, also directed aspects of the project. Here the girls learned about photography and filmmaking. These girls also prepared material for the Year Book. Enjoyment in learning is evident in their report of the project (Worawa Aboriginal College Year Book, 2014).

The making of a short film about the Dreaming Trail commenced the project. The film took the form of a guided tour of the Dreaming Trail with each girl having a particular focus. The purpose was authentic, in that the completed version was shown to all students and from 2015 will be used to introduce visitors to the College.

Photography was the focus for second semester:

*We spent a few weeks exploring the camera, examining how it works, and then we had the opportunity to use Dave’s camera to take photos. We looked at the photos on Photoshop and learned how to edit them in different ways for publication and other use.*

The learning process is evident here and also at the conclusion of the production of the Year Book:

*We have been able to see how simple it is to create a book, but what hard work is necessary to complete the job and to make it
the best product possible.

In 2012 Worawa College took part in the Technology Enriched Curriculum Project (TECP), a cross sectoral project, in conjunction with the Department of Employment, Education and Childhood Development and the Catholic Education Office. The Closing the Gap Federal Government initiative provided funding. The aim of the project was the engagement of Aboriginal students and the improvement of literacy. The vehicle was the use of iPads to tell students’ stories. Fundamentally story connects Aboriginal people to all facets of their lives and Aunty Lois says:

it was wonderful to see the girls wanting to tell their stories.

In relation to technology Kathryn says:

Technology makes a difference for students’ telling their stories, in the way they want it to be heard.

The project was the platform that enabled Worawa students to experience technology, through the use of iPads, to film and write their stories. The results were obvious to all. In 2013 and 2014 students were able to take part in a weekly Elective to undertake a project using an iPad. This usually resulted in the making of a short film. Here they were able to use the editing suite to complete their project.

In her interview, Sinead spoke of using iPads in the classroom. When students learn about a place in the world they can use iPads to locate its geographical position. They can also research different people very easily and also look up different words. Learning with an iPad is not onerous to the students. Sinead says:

when they use iPads they don’t even realise they are learning.

Her thoughts and the thoughts of the girls in the Media project concur with the findings and recommendations from the Technology Enriched Curriculum Project (TECP) (Hooley, Watt & Dakich, 2013: Appendix 31).

In addition to iPads, which are in the Science and Information Technology rooms, banks of laptops are in English and Mathematics classrooms and banks of computers are in the Language and Culture room and the Information Technology room. The media room contains specialist technological equipment and two computers are in each house for the purpose of homework.

Early in Term 4 the girls from Worawa and students from their sister school in Hawai’i came together over Skype. This was a chance to share songs, dances, language and stories from across the world, across cultures and across time zones. The students from both schools enjoyed the Skype session immensely and they will continue this in 2015.
4.4.7.1.1 Challenges

The location of the College provides a challenging situation for the provision of education through technology. There are frequent power outages in the area and there are also places on the property where Internet access is unreliable; this may be caused by natural geographical features or the materials used in the building of certain structures; problems in buildings have been obviated by the addition of booster devices. Skype sessions have been interrupted because of the intermittent nature of the Internet connection. Often too, the speed of the Internet is slow, resulting in frustration of teachers and students, particularly when time has been spent in preparation for learning through this medium.

Dean addressed the problem of reliability and lack of professional support by bringing computers to a central point where he and others used their expertise to remedy some problems. This however, proved a time-consuming process as they needed more than an hour to work on each machine. Dean suggests that a team of students might be trained for this purpose and that would give them valuable skills to take to their communities.

**Link to:** Section 3: Literature Review: Learning with Technology, pages 99-101

Section 8: Appendix 31
4.4.8 Transitions and Pathways

The Pathways Learning Centre includes Careers, Work Experience, Transitions and the Polytechnic & other certificate courses. Thus the school is a “learning web' with linkages and relationships to industry and the community for both curriculum enrichment and experiential learning and action research” (Lepani, 1994, p. 3).

Figure 5.3: Worawa Transitions and Pathways (Thomas, 2010)

4.4.8.1 Careers

Worawa is a 7-10 Middle School. On completion of their studies at Worawa girls transition to further academic studies, VET, VCAL studies or the world of work. During their final year of studies at Worawa they are provided with the opportunity to participate in work experience and they undertake classes to help them prepare for future experiences, including interviews, development of a Curriculum Vitae (CV), subject and course selection. Staff members work with the students and their families to prepare an appropriate pathway for each girl.

The College conducts Careers and Pathways classes, as well as the students’ work experience program. The full program, including preparation for work experience is in Appendix 32. Work experience is arranged for students who arrive in the first two terms of any year. For those students who do not enroll until after the end of Term 2, work experience will be sought in the following year. In some cases work experience will be found for late enrolments. This will depend on availability of placements and on the students learning program. Work experience will (where possible) be held in Week 6 Term 2 and Week 3 Term 3.
The program is currently being developed to include three groups for work experience.

1. Girls who have little or no experience of western commerce:

   *Level One work experience will be offered to students who would benefit from a broad experience of the work force so they can better decide on their own suitability and preferences. My aim is to develop two partners to write and develop this program. World Vision may be that organization, and I will seek one other.*

In 2014, World Vision was the venue for this group of students and they undertook basic work experience. They have a dedicated staff member for work experience and Aboriginal staff, so the girls had a rich, positive, safe experience.

2. Girls who require specific placements:

   *Level Two is preference focused and requires some understanding of the workforce and its expectations. For example, Child Care Placement for two weeks. This experience will require maturity and comfort in a western workforce paradigm. The placement supervisors will be interviewed and briefed, however the expectations on the students will be considerable and similar to the requirements of that chosen field.*

For example in 2014, Shanelle had work experience planned with Bangarra Dance Company, in Sydney and two girls undertook work experience at a local childcare centre in Healesville.

3. Girls who have a clear idea of their future pathway may begin their own little business.

   *Students in Level Three will not often require this placement level. This would include opportunities such as the recent chef and hospitality program that had a term/yearly requirement. This is for girls who are over 16 years old and quite sure of their future direction. They must show the commitment to both school education and to the opportunity to be able to take up any offer.*

The College Pathways program provides students with work experience resulting in industry Certificates of Attainment. Possible placements include the Melbourne Museum and Melbourne Zoos, Healesville Sanctuary, photography and media studies with noted photographer David Callow, hospitality through Healesville Harvest, the Maroondah Hospital, television station Channel 10, World Vision, school and childcare facilities in the Healesville area and legal firms.

In 2014 the senior girls had work experience placements in a television station, an agricultural consultancy company, childcare, primary school, office administration and allied health.
Alliyanna completed her work experience at a local primary school. There she met a few Aboriginal students. Some very young students questioned her, as they were unsure of her ethnicity. They said to her:

*Hey do you speak Japanese? Are you Chinese? Indian? I was shocked they didn’t know.*

In spite of her shock she explained to them exactly who she was. In this instance and generally, Alliyanna must have impressed people at the school as one of the teachers wrote to Worawa:

*I'm a teacher at ............. Primary and I had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know one of your girls this week while she was here on work experience. What a remarkable young woman and fabulous ambassador for Worowa College. On behalf of everyone at ............., thank you again and all the very best for your future. We would love it if you could drop in and visit again!*


In preparation for the girls transitioning to other colleges post Worawa, students research schools in the context of geographical position and curriculum. In English classes the girls to compile a Curriculum Vitae (CV) in the form of a generic letter that may be modified accordingly, for specific applications. In the beginning of 2014 the girls wrote letters to Aunty Lois outlining their aspirations (Appendix 30); at the conclusion of the year they wrote letters telling Aunty Lois how they have benefitted from their learning at Worawa (Appendix 33).
Of the 10 students who exited the College in 2014, eight planned to go on to VCE and other Year 11 & 12 courses in Melbourne and the Northern Territory, whilst two, supported by their families, have opted to return to the College and repeat Year 10 next year. The College has begun discussions with partner organisations and providers, re the possibilities for offering a Worawa-specific and unique work place skills course in 2015, to further extend the skills and possibilities already open to them through current College programs.

From 2015 the College will employ a Careers and Transitions Coordinator to undertake this important work. This takes into account the aspiration of parents and families articulated in the College’s annual Community Forum, to assist students in identifying employment pathways. This position will coordinate the careers and pathways classes as well as the students work experience program.

**Link to:** Section 8: Appendix 32

### 4.4.8.2 External Courses

Worawa Aboriginal College offers realistic pathways to continued education or the world of work through the opportunity to study certificate courses. These courses challenge and extend girls whilst providing potential pathways to further studies and eventual employment. Courses undertaken between 2008 and 2014 include hospitality and tourism, conservation and land management and small business management. William Angliss Institute of TAFE delivers training for Certificate level courses in hospitality, food handling and coffee barista training. The College has a commercial kitchen that assists in development of training skills in this area. Hospitality students undertook work placements at Sanctuary Harvest and one student was offered an apprenticeship at Yarra Valley Lodge, with renowned Chef, Philippe Perrey.

Creative arts programs delivered in the curriculum have vocational education components that highlight VET training and future employment opportunities. The College has creative arts partners including music training for selected students. These include the Malthouse Theatre, Ilbijerri Theatre Company and Wilin Centre for
Indigenous Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts at the University of Melbourne. Worawa’s visual arts program teaches good arts practice including, copyright, commissions, pricing, quality control and preparing their work for an exhibition.

The College vocational and work experience programs include links and/or partnerships with several external agencies through the Outer Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network and Aboriginal community organisations, including the Local Indigenous Network, the (Victorian) Regional Justice Advisory Committee, Victoria Police and the state wide Aboriginal Justice Forum.

A state of the art Polytechnic facility enables the undertaking of Certificate 11 Rural Operations. The Worawa Newsletter, Term 4, 2013, reports:

Students undertaking the Certificate II Rural Operations have finished the year with a flourish having completed their collection of pressed natives (Herbarium) and tended the plants propagated earlier in the year. Experts from the local region extended classwork on recognising fauna and plant identification where the girls learnt many plant adaptations to the Australian environment and scouted for animals using tracks, scats and scent. Over the year the participating girls have acquired the skills detailed for each of the various units and integrated learning from the Rangers program, Science and Culture classes. Through undertaking this certificate students have demonstrated many skills transferable in any vocational setting.

Environmental management through a state of the art horticulture centre provides the opportunity for students to develop knowledge and skills in Indigenous plant use and extends to special projects such as maintaining a Koala feed plantation for the Healesville Sanctuary. Five hectares of Worawa land has been used to establish 10,000 eucalyptus trees, to feed the Sanctuary’s koalas. The ‘Koala Browse’ provides a valuable outdoor learning area and expands student learning, creating awareness and potential for student involvement in Healesville Sanctuary efforts in koala conservation. A strong relationship with the world-renowned Healesville Sanctuary enables students to gain training and work experience in wild life care and management and interpretation.

4.4.8.2.1 Healesville Sanctuary Cadet Ranger Program

The Worawa College website describes the Cadet Ranger Program:

The Worawa Cadet Ranger Program is a whole of school vocational, educational, recreational and personal development program founded upon five integrated activity areas:

- Personal and community development
- Aboriginal cultural heritage and traditional values
- Cultural resource management
- Natural resource management
- Outdoor recreation

The Program is founded upon a ‘hands-on, learn by doing’ philosophy and expands the existing Aboriginal social and cultural heritage program. As part of the Program, the College is implementing an Aboriginal Culture and Environment (ACE) Program.
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in joint partnership with the Healesville Sanctuary. Students work alongside the Sanctuary’s animal keepers in caring for the wild life. Students have access to the ‘Vet for a Day’ program as well as wild life photography workshops with noted photographer Steve Parrish.

Cultural elements, led by Aboriginal Elders, are delivered on the Worawa Dreaming Trail. The program provides participants with a range of ‘hands-on’ vocational training experiences, with an additional focus on areas of potential employment and further training within conservation and environmental resource management appropriate to Aboriginal land use and Caring for Country.

Bronwyn MacCreadie, Curator Operations: Life Science Department, Healesville Sanctuary describes the program in an interview.

In order to learn in a cultural context the girls who enter the program identify their individual totem and make the totem the focus of their work at the Sanctuary. The staff members at the Sanctuary ask the girls to share knowledge of their culture and assist the girls in developing a relationship with the animals they care for. Through this and the requirements of the course there is a strong emphasis on two-way learning. The relationship with the keepers assists the girls to remain focussed and offers opportunities for keepers to cater for different girls learning preference. The keepers give the girls information about work opportunities in the broader community and where possible relate this to the girls’ local communities. They also report that the girls are very polite and happy to talk with them; relationships are respectful and harmonious.

The girls learn well in the program. This is attributed to their wish to care for the animals and their immersion in the tasks. The staff members know this because the girls are willing participants and from the quality of conversation. Both of these are used to assess progress formatively. The keepers attribute the successful learning to the environment of the Sanctuary and the fact that the learning is through ‘hands on’ tasks. Bronwyn cites the enthusiasm of the girls and staff to make the program viable. Briefings that occur from time to time, about the girls’ backgrounds or issues from Worawa staff have helped the Sanctuary staff better understand and communicate with the girls who come into the program. Bronwyn stresses that building relationships with the staff, successful learning and the consequent rise in confidence are all achieved over time and these lead to positive outcomes.

Challenges stem mainly from insufficient time in the program and lack of continuity of students. Face to face time is only 4 hours per fortnight and it is therefore difficult to build meaningful relationships with the girls; this challenge is sometimes compounded by late arrivals, lack of appropriate gear or absenteeism. In addition, the cohort changes regularly. Only a few girls complete the whole year. In 2013, 14 girls rotated through the program and only 4 had quality time, enabling them to participate in certificate studies. The literacy levels in the certificate 1 course trialed with Box Hill TAFE in 2014 provided another challenge, as they seemed too high for most girls. Similar feedback came from Dean after the year ended. Because of this the written tasks take away the capacity and the enjoyment of the learning. Bronwyn says that the differences in views and life experience regarding conservation
of animals in a western scientific culture and the provision of native animals as food in an indigenous culture can be a philosophical challenge for the girls.

In addition to this program two girls attend Healesville sanctuary every Sunday to work with children. They conduct face-painting sessions.

5. Conclusion

The narrative of Worawa Aboriginal College continues in the vision and tradition of Hyllus Maris to develop strong, proud Aboriginal young women, who can walk in two worlds. The data in the preceding pages attest to this. In conclusion we return to the overarching concepts of Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning and the thoughts of the proud, young Aboriginal women who are the students.

5.1 Connectedness:

a sense of belonging to a learning community.

When the girls were asked what they would say about Worawa to someone who was thinking of coming to the school, many responses reflect Connectedness, connectedness to place and people:

Worawa is a place you call home. Regina (Ntaria/ Hermansburg)

Worawa will make you feel at home even though you are a long way from home. You become one, as a family I guess. Maxine (Tiwi)

Worawa is not like a normal school, it is like a school filled
with love. Everyone cares for everyone. You are pretty much part of the family. Andrea (Darwin)

You’ll miss Worawa when you leave. Hakira (South Australia)

5.2 Learning:

a complex co-emergent process of holistic development enabled through the construction of meaning, taking place within a community that is dynamic and robust in adapting to changing circumstances.

Many responses to the same question reflect Learning in the context of the Worawa Way.

To come to Worawa will be the best decision you will ever make. It will help you find out who you are, help you discover yourself in many ways you had not known before. Jamira (Bardi resides Collinwood)

Worawa gives you so many opportunities and teaches you not just learning but life long skills. It’s just a good environment. Jaden (Darwin)

Worawa is the best boarding school and we have ‘4R’s’ and it is fun. Sasha (Elcho Island)

The ‘4R’s’ mean a lot to me. Responsibility, Respect, Relationship and Rigour mean a lot to me. Alliyanna (Wadeye)

The ‘4R’s go with you everywhere. Jamira (Bardi, resides Collinwood)

The ‘4R’s’ are good values to have because you need them throughout your whole life. Jaden (Darwin)

5.3 Empowerment:

the ability to act with confidence in order to direct one’s own life within the context of a learning community.

When the girls were asked how they had changed in their time at Worawa, many responses reflect empowerment:

Worawa has changed my life it has given me an idea of where I want to go and what I want to do in the future. I don’t know what I want to do but I feel confident. Jamira (Bardi, resides Collinwood)

At Worawa I have made friends and this has given me confidence. Zarkema (Warmun)
If I hadn’t come to Worawa I’d probably be home doing nothing, walking round community smoking, doing a lot of bad stuff like drinking alcohol. Maxine (Tiwi)

Before I came to Worawa, if someone asked for my help I would say, “Ask someone else.” but now I just give all my help and I am very much the big sister. It gave me a second chance at schooling.

Andrea (Darwin)

At Worawa, I guess I grew up. Hakira (South Australia)

Here I am and I have learned and changed so much.
I am proud of what I have achieved over the past 4 years.
My family is proud and my community is proud of me too. Alliyanna (Wadeye)

Worawa has shaped and transformed me from a scared immature girl to this grown up, confident and bright woman – a leader. Andrea (Darwin)

All the girls express gratitude for their time at Worawa and are determined to translate the learning into their future lives. When asked if she might change something at Worawa in order to make it a better school, Kahealea acknowledges that three years ago she would have had along list of suggestions, but now she says that change is unnecessary and:

Worawa is an experience I will never forget.

Zarkema expressed gratitude simply but powerfully, when she concluded her speech at the Presentation Day in 2013 with the words:

I would like to thank Aunty Lois, Kim and everyone else at Worawa for changing my life and making me a happier person.
All your faces and names are engraved in my heart.