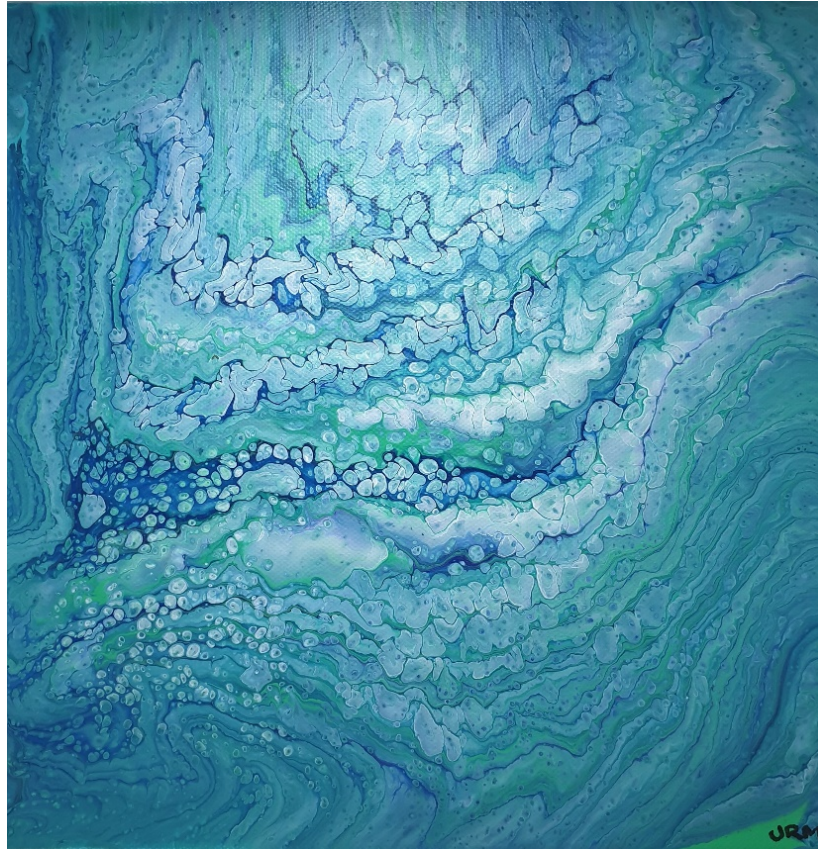




# MONASH University



## **The idea of Reconciliation in Australian universities and how it has been articulated through Reconciliation Action Plans**

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BA. Dip. Ed., M. Ed. (Hons)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at Monash University in 2019

Faculty of Education

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Cover page artwork, © Jeannie Morrison (2019) entitled: *Nidja kebitj boodja-k ngandabat baranginy* (*Running Water Giving Life to Earth*)

Nidja (The) kebitj (running water) boodja-k (on ground) ngandabat (life) baranginy (getting)

## **Abstract**

Scholars have long researched the complex process of reconciliation in postcolonial countries, in which groups of peoples, who were once in conflict with each other, now attempt to live together in a ‘reconciled’ state. This formal reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians became part of the national, political discourse in the late 1980s, with Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) introduced in 2006. There is limited research on the manifestation of reconciliation and the use of RAPs in Australia, let alone in the context of institutions, such as universities.

This project explored reconciliation in Australian universities by examining how reconciliation was articulated and executed through four universities’ RAPs. A policy ethnographic approach was utilised, in which the RAP was the policy that directed the research. Document analysis, interviews and a hybrid form of self-study—Refractive Reconciliatory Self-study (RRS)—were used to gather data for the policy ethnography.

The results of this study indicated that reconciliation in universities is based on the determination of ‘right’ relationship between the majority non-Indigenous peoples and First Nations peoples. The four RAPs highlighted good relationships as the most significant of the three original RAP pillars—relationship, respect and opportunities—to enable reconciliation, which was confirmed by interview data and the RRS. However, reconciliation exists along a complex and dynamic Reconciliation Spiralling Continuum (RSC), which is evidenced by well-intentioned though sometimes assimilationist practices, through to reciprocal partnerships and Indigenous rights-based reconciliation. It was evident that the RAPs could be a useful tool to enact reconciliation. It was also evident that several participants were cynical of the formal national reconciliation process because it had been predicated on a compromise response by governments over the years, who had dismissed calls from First Nations for treaty and sovereignty. RAPs are a useful device for universities who require direction about the articulation and evaluation of reconciliation-related actions. However, given that the RAP is trademarked and belongs to a corporate body, it was also viewed by some as a restriction on how they expressed reconciliation within their universities.

Given there was not one theory to explain how a university negotiated the nuances of the reconciliation space within the RSC, the synergistic South-West Indigenist Theory (SWIT)

was developed to achieve this. The SWIT (see Figure 6.2) was shaped from a blend of Southern theory, Indigenist theory and Reconciliation theory, founded ‘On-Country’, informed by Indigenous knowledges and filtered by Western knowledges within Australian universities. This synergistic theory can be used to describe the evidence of reconciliation activity—or lack thereof.

Importantly within this reconciliation space, are wise experienced people, Reconciliation Elders, who understand university reconciliation, and RAPs. I support the Reconciliation Elders, who argue that universities should be at the forefront of determining and challenging how reconciliation in Australia should be shaped into the future. This reconciliation is based on Indigenous rights, steeped in respectful dialogic relationships, along with ethical inclusive teaching and research, including the RSS, and leadership from First Nations within the university sector. The Reconciliation Elders also advised that the transformational changes of creating a more reconciled society would be evolutionary and realised differently with future generations. Finally, this reconciliation, with or without a RAP, is based On-Country in ‘Boodja Neh’ (listening to the land), in which First Nations’ voices and knowledges are given precedence, as per the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

Please note: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this thesis includes names and references to people who are deceased.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Student: Veronica Goerke

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019

The undersigned hereby certifies that the above declaration correctly reflects the nature and extent of the student's and co-authors' contributions to this work. In instances in which I am not the responsible author, I have consulted with the responsible author to agree on the respective contributions of the authors.

Main Supervisor: Zane Diamond

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019

## Publications during candidature

- Anderson, P. J. & **Goerke, V. M.** (2017, July). *The formal reconciliation agenda: Does it have a place in education?* Paper presented at World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education 2017: A celebration of resilience, Toronto, Canada.
- Goerke, V. M.**, Morrison, J., Labunda, M. & Forrest, S. (2017, February). *Reconciliation via the re-creation of professional learning into the online environment*. Paper presented at the 26th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, Perth, Australia. Retrieved from <http://ctl.curtin.edu.au/events/conferences/tlf/tlf2017/contents-all.html>
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- Wynne, C. & **Goerke, V. M.** (2017, July). *Stealing back the stolen: A heroic story of resilience of Aboriginal children determined to return to kin and country*. Paper presented at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education 2017: A celebration of resilience, Toronto, Canada.

## Acknowledgements

First, I acknowledge with deep gratitude the First Peoples and their country on which I was born, live now and where I wrote this thesis:

*Ngaala kaaditj Wadjuck Noongar moort, kura, yeye wer boordah, keyen kaadak nidja boodja.*

*I acknowledge the Wadjuck Noongar nation, past, present and future, as the original custodians of the land on which I live.*

I also acknowledge my ancestors and their country, with whom I maintain a strong connection:

*Mi ricugnùs i mèe antenèe e il mèe paès della Valtellina, Italia.*

*I acknowledge my ancestors and home country of the Valtellina, Italy.*

My first thank you is to Noongar Elder and colleague, Jeannie Morrison, who contributed so much to this project (including the cover page artwork which symbolises our connection to this thesis). Her friendship, warmth and wisdom have guided me from when I first began to contemplate reconciliation in our university.

My gratitude also goes to:

- Beth Mowry (1953–2016), an exceptional teacher and friend, who via literature and history textbooks, introduced me to Australia's First Nations.
- My First Nation students, especially Kirk McCarron (grandchild of the Goolarabooloo Elder and author, Paddy Roe), whom I taught in Tardun, Western Australia. It was from these boys I first learned about 'Boodjah Neh' (see Chapter 2).
- John Gherardi, also a child of ancestors from Valtellina, who introduced me to people from the Noongar nation and to my husband.
- The women of Anawim (now Kambarang Place) in East Perth, Western Australia, who introduced me to local Indigenous ontologies—to 'katajininy warniny'.
- Current and former colleagues at Curtin University. Along with those acknowledged elsewhere in this thesis, I add: Profs Beverley Oliver and Shelley Yeo, who endorsed

me to start this research; Profs Jill Downie and Jon Yorke, who supported me to finish it; and Dr Bea Tucker, Dr Connie Price, A/Prof Craig Zimitat, Evelyn Whitfield, Eric Martini, A/Prof Julie Hoffman, Prof David Gibson and Prof Vanessa Chang, who encouraged me to persevere.

- Dr Anne Harris, generous friend who checked early drafts to note that I had ignored the style guide and who prompted me to rework excessively long sentences and confused ideas.
- Capstone Editing who provided copyediting and proofreading services, according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national ‘Guidelines for Editing Research Theses’.
- My reference group, some whom I have already named, who wisely counselled me: Margy Dia, Dr Robin Barrington, Lynne Vautier, Ann Kosovich, Juris Varpins, A/Prof Di Gardiner, Gabrielle Whitely and A/Prof Sue Jones.
- Dear family and friends who patiently listened and prodded me to hang in there.
- My precious children, Damien, Alannah and Megan, for loving, humouring and steadfastly believing in me. It is for you, your children and your peers that I ultimately have engaged in this thinking and writing.
- My husband and best friend, Mark Goerke, who often called me ‘Dr No-Aspiring’ to help me persevere with this thesis. To him I give my deepest thanks. We met during the 1980s, while working in a ‘reconciliation space’ and our first date was going to the play, *No Sugar* by Jack Davis (The Maltings, North Perth, February 1985), which set the tone for our life work and led me to circle in on this research.
- Finally, my supervisors. To my primary supervisor, Prof Zane Diamond (Ma Rhea): when I searched Australia for someone who had ‘walked the talk’ and not just done the research, I did not know that I would be blessed with the wisest and most outstanding of supervisors in the country. Thus, I became a (very satisfied) Monash University student! Zane invited Prof Peter Anderson to be my co-supervisor. Peter was a perfect complement to Zane, with his loud, warm laugh and challenging counsel. You two have been an exemplary team to guide and push me to this point. Thank you. Thank you.



## **Proviso**

Through the ethics process, each institution was made aware that I was questioning selected staff about their RAPs and in writing up this work, I have been ever mindful of the good intentions and often bold leadership evident at each university. These four universities were frontrunners among higher education institutions in their public engagement in formal reconciliation. Any perceived criticisms of an individual institution are unintended consequences of my interpretations of the findings and are not malicious. The reputation of each university is held in high regard and thus, when reading this thesis, people are asked to consider the limitations of my analyses as well as those of the universities' processes and policies at that point in time.

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## Glossary

Boodjah Neh	Wadjuk Noongar words for ‘listen/listening to the land/Earth’.
First Peoples/First Nations/Indigenous peoples	Definitions for these terms as used by the United Nations are based on ILO 169, Article 1 and are copied here, which includes the explanation that such terms are used to depict:

*1. (a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;*

*(b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.*

*2. Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply (ILO, 1989).*

Depending on the context of the discussion, First Nations of Australia, First Peoples of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous and Indigenous Australians are used interchangeably throughout this document and refer to the original inhabitants of Australian and Torres Strait Islander lands and seas. In this thesis, ‘Indigenous’ with an upper case ‘I’ refers to Indigenous peoples of Australia.

indigenous and non-indigenous	The lowercase version of ‘indigenous’ is used when referring broadly to First Peoples across the world, just as the lowercase ‘non-indigenous’ refers broadly to those who are not First Peoples.
Keip, Kaip	Noongar word for ‘water’ (Wadjuk and Bibbulman spelling).
Katajininy warniny	Wadjuk Noongar words that mean ‘ways of being, knowing and doing’.
Local	Referring to the university’s Australian campus and the country where it is located.
National	Of Australia.
Non-Indigenous	All other peoples in Australia who do not identify as First Nations of Australia.
Noongar/ Nyungar/ Nyoongar	Name of nation consisting of 14 clan or language groups located in the south-west region of Western Australia. Each clan speaks a variation of the language depending on location. I have mostly used the spelling ‘Noongar’, which is used by the Wadjuk nation.
On-Country	Being on the land or/and waterways as either the First Peoples, or if non-Indigenous, often with (but not always) local First Peoples, where one is practicing Boodjah Neh
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)	The Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2007. Australia accepted and signed in 2009. The UNDRIP ‘establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing



human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to Indigenous peoples’ (United Nations, 2008).

university or the  
academy

Words used to refer specifically to Australian universities, of which there are currently 41. Other terms, such as higher education, tertiary education colleges and post-secondary school education, are not used unless these places are not classified as universities or were referred to in this way by other writers.

Wadjuck/Wadjuk

Noongar nation/clan from the Perth, Western Australia region.

Wadjella/s

Wadjuk Noongar word for non-Indigenous people; often used to refer to people of European heritage.

## **List of abbreviations**

AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ARB	Australian Reconciliation Barometer
ANU	Australian National University
ATSHEAC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Committee
CAR	Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
CAS	Centre for Aboriginal Studies
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
Curtin	Curtin University
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EBA	Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
IHEAC	Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISSP	Indigenous Student Success Program
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
Melb	University of Melbourne
MMAS	Middle Management Staff
NATSIHEC	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (Aboriginal Corporation)
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NUP	Non-University Personnel

PVC	Pro-Vice-Chancellor
RRS	Refractive Reconciliatory Self-study
RSC	Reconciliation Spiralling Continuum
SEAS	Senior Executive Academic Staff
SWIT	South–West Indigenist theory
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UoN	University of Newcastle
VC	Vice-Chancellor

# 1. Introduction

As a nation we need to be able to move together. I guess that it's hard in both my thinking and Reconciliation Australia's version of reconciliation. We often, even at Reconciliation Australia and personally, flick back and forth as to what it is. Is reconciliation a process or is reconciliation an end thing? Our version at Reconciliation Australia is that we have a reconciled, just Australia. That to me in many ways is sometimes an end approach. It definitely is also a process of reconciliation and part of that process it does mean that we do need to have some truths about history. Even among ourselves as Aboriginal people, about identity and the really big things. It's certainly a big huge thing. Reconciliation is a large word and can mean so many things to different people at an individual sense and as an organisation as well (Interviewee #1).

I have colleagues here [on the campus] who run Indigenous cultural awareness and I think they're telling a very happy version of it. It's like, oh yes it was terrible up until 1967, but then this happened and this happened and then we had the review into Indigenous deaths in custody and then we had the commission into our stolen; then we had Mabo and then we had The Apology. Almost like, and now we've just got to tinker a little bit and fix the constitution! And I just think ... that's being away with the pixies! There is just so much work to do! (Interviewee #9).

## 1.1 Aim and background

The aim of this research was to analyse reconciliation and the impact of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) in Australian universities. To achieve this aim, I used an inductive interpretivist approach to conduct a policy ethnography, starting with RAPs, and then listening to people connected to these plans. My experience working in the 'reconciliation space' over several decades added a further dimension to the project. The policy ethnography led me to analyse data from RAPs and associated documents from four universities, which along with interview data from people from those same universities and my reflections on my role in this space, enabled an assessment of the university reconciliation journey. By comparing the words written in the RAPs and the words spoken—and unspoken—in the interviews and self-study, the phenomena of university *Reconciliation* and *reconciliation* were revealed.

The impetus for me to undertake this research was that after many years I had become increasingly aware, as a member of the majority non-Indigenous academic community, of how difficult it was for the voices of First Nations people to be heard within the university. I

work at Curtin University, which is recognised as being at the forefront in the education of Australia's First Nations and reconciliation. The university's leaders had first made public declarations of commitment to reconciliation between the First Nations and the non-Indigenous peoples in 1998, and then in 2008 when they became the first university with a RAP. Even in this proactive, inclusive environment I regularly noted the inadvertent and systemic racism experienced by First Nations colleagues, and also by their peers at other universities. The challenges to reconciliation became more evident when I worked in the part-time role of the RAP Facilitator. The challenges noted included: the small number of First Nations people in senior leadership roles; the resistance of staff and students, to attempts at integrating Indigenous Knowledges into the curriculum; the lack of prominence of Indigenous research methodologies; and the general inability of the system to acknowledge and include Indigenous knowledges within mainstream activities.

The struggle with reconciliation persisted despite the existence of a RAP, which led me to question why, and to interrogate expressions of university reconciliation with others, especially with First Nations colleagues. I wanted to understand what led First Nations scholars to feel as Kanien'kehá:ka scholar, Taiaiake Alfred (2004) did, when he argued that universities 'are adamantly and aggressively opposed to Indigenous ways' and that 'Indigenous peoples' experiences in universities reflect the tensions and dynamics of our relationship as Indigenous peoples interacting with people and institutions in society as a whole' (p. 88). Further, Brounéus (2008) conducted a significant review of reconciliation literature for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and found that there were few empirical studies regarding reconciliation and argued that more research was required to examine the concept at national, social and individual levels.

My knowledge of the RAP as the university's approved 'plan' for reconciliation became a way for me to uncover some of the complex issues within the lived experiences of reconciliation. Hereafter, my research became grounded in the RAPs and the people whose work was associated with these plans. The research was limited to four Australian universities: the Australian National University (ANU), Curtin University (Curtin), the University of Melbourne (Melb) and the University of Newcastle (UoN). The findings could be applied to Australian universities generally and offer insight into similar postcolonial places of higher education in countries where there are conversations and activities about reconciliation. In writing this document, I echo Brennan (2015), who stated that:

I write for competent conscientious whitefellas convinced that we still have an unfinished national agenda and for those Indigenous Australians still minded to give us the benefit of the doubt despite the gap between rhetoric and reality in accommodating their legitimate aspirations in the life of the nation (p. 38).

### 1.1.1 There is work to be done

Before going further into the mechanistic view of this thesis, here is a short yarn for the reader who is wondering if there really is an issue that requires exploration. This story was shared with me by a First Nations woman about an event that occurred on a university campus during 2018. This story captures the essence of the often awkward relationships experienced by the majority non-Indigenous people in Australian universities with their First Peoples and the opportunities for reconciliation that are easily thwarted by the system:

*It was a special date on the university calendar—a public lecture was to be given by a person who was known to have made a positive and courageous contribution for the betterment of Australia. The person to deliver the lecture had an international reputation for his work and was also significantly, a descendant of one of the First Nations of Australia. The invitations to the lecture went out to the public and hundreds had accepted.*

*On the afternoon, prior to the lecture, there was to be a VIP afternoon tea for the visitor and other special guests, which included an ex-Prime Minister of Australia, the University senior executive and some of the most senior First Nations staff of the university. The afternoon tea was to be held in the Indigenous centre building, in which the staff and students were predominantly from Australia's First Nations. As University protocols dictated that only people who were recognised as most senior in the hierarchy of the institution were to be present, by mid-afternoon all the staff who worked in the centre were asked to vacate their building. Incidentally, many of these same staff members planned to attend the lecture later that day. Several of these staff thus went and sat in the gardens outside the building, so that when they were allowed, they could later to return to their offices. Upon their arrival at the campus, the guest speaker and the ex-Prime Minister went into the garden area and chatted and took photos with these staff members, until the Vice-Chancellor (VC) called the two special guests to come inside.*

*The protocols of the university were observed, but 'other' people's protocols were ignored. One of the First Nations workers who had been ousted from the building for the VIP event expressed her indignation at being asked to leave her office. However, she also expressed her delight at how the invited guests had chosen to spend time with 'the outsiders' and that when the VC called the special guests to come inside, there had been evidence of discomfort, annoyance and amusement when these two guests attempted to usurp the*

*institutional protocol and tried to invite the ‘outsiders’ to also come inside to attend the afternoon tea with them.*

This event exemplifies one case of subconscious institutional racism that appears to blind people to natural opportunities for reconciliation. Surely, the awkwardness and apparent discomfort among those sipping tea inside the building while their colleagues sat outside—colleagues who had been ousted from their workplace, so that only those who were recognised by the Western academy as being VIPs could be together inside—is absurd, if it were not also sad. Here was such an easy opportunity for the leaders of the academy to recognise and respect their First Nations colleagues. However, the opportunity was lost in the hierarchical conventions of an institution that behaved as though it was rigidly bound by Western protocols that determined who could come to a tea party that was held in a building devoted to the First Nations place of learning on the Great South Land.

### **1.1.2 Chapter overview**

As well as introducing the project, Chapter 1 includes an explanation of key words and an overview of the historical background to reconciliation and RAPs. This background contains information about reconciliation in the international sphere as well as the historical context for Australian reconciliation. It concludes by briefly presenting the four project universities and their RAPs.

### **1.1.3 Research question and methodology**

The key overarching research question of this qualitative study, which used the RAP as a lens to examine reconciliation in Australian universities was:

What does the idea of Reconciliation look like in Australian universities and how has it been articulated through RAPs?

The interview questions (see Appendix A) expound this research question further. I used policy ethnography methodology, which was shaped by a basic document analysis that led to rich interview data and a refractive self-study. The existence, positioning and usage of the RAP documents as part of reconciliation was of key initial interest in this study. However, the experience of conducting the research project within the nuanced reconciliation space of the academy led to the addition of a further layer to the policy ethnography: a form of self-study.

The policy ethnography methodology was chosen because it promised to provide the most honest grassroots story regarding university RAPs. By situating the research and analysis in the RAPs and using them as the directors for the research process, I was able to explore the effects and connections of these plans on people and other key policies, such as university strategic plans, to determine how and if they worked together.

I used purposeful sampling of the first university RAPs based on the typology of Australian Universities as suggested by Marginson (1999). Marginson had noted evidence of diversity among Australian universities ‘based in historical distinctions’ (p. 16) and named the following segments (Marginson, 1999, p. 17):

Sandstone—established prior to World War I

Redbrick—established 1940–1959

Gumtree—established 1960–1975

UniTech—established from the merger or reshaping of teachers’ colleges, colleges of advanced education and or institutes of technology.

New Universities—established after 1987

I chose a representative sample within each of these segments: Sandstone—Melb; Redbrick—ANU; Gumtree—UoN; Unitech—Curtin; and New Universities—Southern Cross University. The latter university was subsequently dropped from the project when a university restructure meant staff who had agreed to participate, were no longer available.

## **1.2 Definitions of key words and terms**

Key words, terms and associated acronyms are provided in the glossary, but those that are pertinent to understanding the main research question are provided here.

### **1.2.1 Reconciliation**

This project defines and unpacks the idea of ‘reconciliation’ in the specific context of the Australian university, but it is helpful to first consider the definition of the word within the English language. The online Oxford Dictionary’s (2016) definition of reconciliation is ‘the restoration of friendly relations’ and ‘the action of making one view or belief compatible with another’. While there are numerous explanations for the origin of the word, the dictionary’s first entries include several biblical allusions, all referring to the restoration of relationships between God and His (sic) people. James (2008) claimed that whether it is political or



personal, reconciliation is a somewhat ambiguous and indeterminate state, which provided a relevant starting point for this research. He noted it is ‘a never-concluding, often uncomfortable process of remaking or bringing together (from the Latin “reconcilare”) of persons, practices and meanings in ongoing places of meeting (from the Latin “concilium”)’ (James, 2008, p. 117). Often referred to as the ‘Father of Reconciliation’ in Australia, Dodson (2007) offered a supplementary explanation for the formal, political process of Reconciliation in Australia, which provided both a challenge and affirmation for my research:

Reconciliation gave Australia a doorway to a political settlement approach on how the modern Australian state could recognise the traditional ownership status of Indigenous people and unravel the historical layers of colonial legacy that continue to determine contemporary relationships between Indigenous communities and Australian governments *and other institutions* (my emphasis) (p. 21).

With RAPs as my lens, I have ‘unravelling’ some of these ‘layers of colonial legacy’ and explored this ‘contemporary relationship’ within the institution of the university. I have followed Sutton (2009, p. 247), in the usage of the capitalised version of the word, ‘Reconciliation’ to denote the formal political and bureaucratic processes associated with international, national and local processes, whereas the lowercase ‘reconciliation’ is used to denote reconciliation in the informal, often personal, state. There is no intention to indicate that these are binary concepts. As revealed in the data, there are many instances in which these two states are so embedded or intertwined with each other that one cannot—should not—differentiate between them. However, I have mostly used the capitalised form when both aspects could be implied.

### **1.2.2 RAPs**

Since 2006, RAPs have been a significant aspect of the formal Reconciliation process in Australia. RAPs, which exist in many businesses, government departments and educational institutions throughout Australia, are documents that outline a plan for what those organisations intend to do to enact reconciliation between the majority population and Australia’s First Nations peoples. RAPs were created in 2006 by Reconciliation Australia who stated that the key purpose of a RAP was to help organisations ‘turn their good intentions into real actions’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2017). Explanations for RAPs on the Reconciliation Australia website have changed throughout the life of this project. For several years, the first sentence stated that ‘through the RAP program, organisations develop business

plans that document what they will do within their sphere of influence to contribute to Reconciliation’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2013). In April 2019, this was changed to ‘the RAP program provides a framework for organisations to support the national reconciliation movement’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2019a).

### **1.2.3 First Nations/First Peoples/Indigenous Australians/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders**

These imperfect terms name peoples who have long, ongoing connections to the land and ancestors who lived on the land that we call Australia pre-1788. As there is no official definition of ‘Indigenous’ regarding Australia’s First Peoples (AIATSIS, 2014), I take advice from senior First Nations people I know and from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) who base it on the United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO) explanation (see Glossary), that instead ‘identifies’ Indigenous peoples. Where possible, I have used the name of the relevant First Nation or the general term ‘First Nations’, but have also used the various other terms when relevant.

### **1.2.4 Indigenous and Western knowledges**

Given that this research was centred on universities in Australia, it is helpful to provide an explanation for the two key epistemologies within this context because they are discussed several times throughout the thesis. Whereas the use of the term ‘indigenous knowledges’ in education refers more broadly to the complex ‘multidimensional body of understandings’(Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 136) belonging to First Nations around the globe, in this thesis I refer mostly to the First Nations of Australia and use the upper-case ‘Indigenous knowledges’. Importantly, Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges are not viewed as binary or definitive concepts among other epistemologies. With Nakata (2007), I acknowledge that Indigenous knowledges are ‘different things in different places to different people’ (p. 185). However, again, specific to this thesis, Indigenous knowledges refers to the unique local ways of knowing of the First Nations of Australia and while diverse, they have an ‘oral nature’ and acknowledge that Indigenous peoples ‘share collective rights and interests in this knowledge’ (Nakata, p. 185).

The term ‘Western knowledges’ refers to the scientific, usually positivist epistemology that originated from Europe and is the knowledge system upon which the Australian university

system is based. Breidlid (2013) adds further with explanations about the hegemonic role of this colonial form of Western epistemology which goes back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and how thus positioned, this system included the concept of ‘Othering’ (p. 7). Furthermore, this epistemology, especially in the realm of education, has ‘led the colonizers to assume an inherent intellectual ethnocentrism’ (Teasdale, 1995, p. 588).

### **1.3 History of reconciliation**

This section provides the historical and political background for this research. Although there is no definitive ontological explanation for the process of reconciliation—or the state of being reconciled—there are many ways in which people have provided epistemological evidence of its presence, especially as a process. The formal concept has been a vexed issue in Australia since it was first introduced as a national political process during the 1980s. Before considering why this is so, it is helpful to briefly consider the idea of Reconciliation in the international context.

#### **1.3.1 International reconciliation narratives**

The concept of Reconciliation has been explored within peace studies (Morrison, 2011, p. 820) and is a critical component of the ‘peace versus justice’ debate, which centres on Reconciliation as being part of the ‘peace’ that explains the ways in which ‘societies emerging from political violence and repressive rule can address human rights abuses committed in the past’ (Rodman, 2011, p. 824,). The contemporary understanding of political Reconciliation can also be linked to attempts by Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War to reconcile the North and the South (Rodman, 2011). This notion was further developed among older disciplines such as sociology, philosophy and psychology, in which there appears to be an abundance of research and thinking about Reconciliation and related concepts. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Canadian TRC provide the most relevant examples of Reconciliation in national, formalised environments that are similar to the Australian context. However, as Hattam, Atkinson and Bishop (2012, p. 3) noted, the differences between the expression of reconciliation in South Africa and Australia are vast. For example, Reconciliation in South Africa was instigated by a black majority leadership to try to peacefully address a recent history of horrific violence perpetrated by a white minority. Instead in Australia, when the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was formed to respond to similar injustices by the settler-colonials, it

was a white population who had the majority power against the minority population of First Nations.

Australian Reconciliation was further shaped from the work achieved in the social justice context, often with a religious link—notably by the various Christian churches. Significantly, the inception of annual National Reconciliation Week in Australia, now promoted and observed annually, began as an ecumenical week of prayer for Reconciliation in 1993 (Reconciliation Australia, 2019f), which was organised by these churches to honour the International Year of Indigenous Peoples. Connected to this are discussions regarding political forgiveness within political Reconciliation. These ideas are used as interchangeable entries in the *Encyclopaedia of Global Justice* (Hughes, 2011), in which the Sorry Book is referred to as an example of ‘political behaviour aimed in part at achieving some form of forgiveness or reconciliation with a group who have been wronged’ (p. 867).

### ***1.3.1.1 The Canadian higher education perspective***

The Canadian experience of political reconciliation offers pertinent insights for the Australian university sector. For example, Smith (2017) explored aspects of reconciliation within Canadian higher education institutions and reflected on how he, as someone in a senior position, thought reconciliation should be understood; how his workplace enacted reconciliation and addressed changes that he felt were required for reconciliation to occur. He used statistics about Indigenous student engagement, such as retention figures, as well as the many plans and campus activities. Smith’s (2017) final hopeful and realistic observation was that ‘Reconciliation in the academy requires difficult conversations; there will be sceptics and opponents and there will be champions and allies. Fundamental change is difficult for any major societal institution, let alone one which can trace its history back 1,000 years’ (p. 73).

The university related reconciliation Smith and others is referring to, is occurring within the backdrop of a national reconciliation process. The Canadian TRC was established in 2008 as an outcome from the 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. The 2015 TRC report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b) called on the Canadian government to fully implement the UNDRIP and also called on the education sector to engage especially with Article 14 of the UNDRIP, regarding the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine and control their education. While RAPs do not exist in Canada, since 2015 Canadian universities have demonstrated their response to the TRC recommendations in their

public reports and on their websites (e.g., Queen's University at Kingston's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force, University of Waterloo's Truth and Reconciliation Response Projects). Referring to the challenges of the 'indigenisation' of the curriculum, Zinga (2018) noted some of the complexities of translating reconciliation in a Canadian university, asserting that 'reconciliation requires an examination and understanding of what has happened and how current structures, systems and attitudes/biases that are conscious or unconscious continue to uphold colonialism and Eurocentrism' (p. 2). First Nation Canadian scholars, Sasakamoose and Shauneen (2015) argued that the amount of work they must do is so much more than non-Indigenous peoples because they must constantly explain and justify their knowledges to their peers 'to address these absences [of knowledge and understanding from their university colleagues] in the university, we are compelled to work towards the re-centring of these knowledge systems and pedagogies to ensure our survival as Indigenous peoples in higher education' (p. 3). Further, they must do extra work to correct and educate their colleagues 'about culturally responsive practices in support of greater levels of Indigenization' (Sasakamoose & Shauneen, 2015, p. 11). Their experience is echoed in the universities in this project.

### **1.3.2 Australian narratives about reconciliation**

Because I adhere to a relativist epistemology, although I provide the historical context for the formal political story of reconciliation in Australia, I have only noted a few of the myriad of events deemed useful in providing some background to university RAPs and their associated reconciliation stories.

#### ***1.3.2.1 Reconciliation—colonial understandings***

There are some insights into the current challenges of reconciliation to be gained from observing how the word was used in the documents of the early colonialists. Woodward (1974, p. 151) cited a letter written by Governor Arthur Phillip to Lord Sydney in 1788. The letter captures a version of reconciliation related to making some sort of relationship, albeit the expectation was that the First Peoples were expected to make all the concessions and live as the settlers: 'When I shall have time to mix more with them every means shall be used to reconcile them to live amongst us'. In another letter two years later, Phillip wrote:

Not a native had come near the settlement for many months and it was absolutely necessary that we should attain their language, or teach them ours,

that the means of redress might be pointed out to them if they are injured and to reconcile them by showing the many advantages they would enjoy by mixing with us (as cited in Woodward, 1974, p. 151).

However, in Australia, it was not until the latter decades of the 20th century that the idea of a formal, national conversation about reconciliation was raised in the public arena.

### **1.3.2.2     *Formal reconciliation—a concession on recognition and treaty***

There are several significant moments in the Australian Reconciliation story, that though were not specifically labelled as ‘reconciliation’ at the time, are evidence of attempts to heal injustices or acknowledge wrongdoing by the colonisers/settlers. These events include the Referendum of 27 May 1967 where more than 90% of the Australian population voted to count First Nations in the census; 1975 when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam poured earth into Vincent Lingiari hand in a gesture to acknowledge Wave Hill land was being given back to the Gurindji nation; the Redfern Address by the Hon Paul Keating in 1992 (referred to by one of the research participants); and the Mabo v. Queensland decision of 3 June 1992, when the High Court of Australia recognised that the concept of ‘terra nullius’ was a lie and that the First Peoples had a unique ongoing connection to the land and waters of Australia. The latter was also referred to by research participants and is celebrated as part of the annual National Reconciliation Week.

Other important dates are the first national Sorry Day, 26 May 1998, which commemorated the day the report into the Stolen Generations (Indigenous children who had been taken away from their families and countries between 1905–1970s, based on government legislation connected to an Act in 1905) was tabled in Parliament. Ten years later, on 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd publicly said ‘sorry’ on behalf of the Australian government to the country’s Stolen Generations after many years of the previous Prime Minister declaring he would never ‘apportion blame’ (Gunstone, 2007, p. 73) for any past wrongs. However, it is the history of the formal Reconciliation process, that includes the formation of Reconciliation Australia where the RAPs come from that is most relevant to the background of this study.

#### *The realisation of an official movement*

Reconciliation was mentioned in the Australian political arena in 1983 in a speech by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Clyde Holding (Hattam & Matthews, 2012, p. 13). However,

Reconciliation as a formal process was first connected to the paper presented at a law conference in 1988, which proposed the establishment of an Australian Recognition Commission to recognise the rights of Australia's First Nations (Brennan & Crawford, 1990, as cited in Brennan, 2007). The authors, Brennan & Crawford (Brennan, 2007) had wanted to resurrect the idea of recognition and treaty from the 1979 National Aboriginal Conference that Senator Fred Chaney as the Liberal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, had welcomed and worked to progress with the Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. Chaney's successor, Senator Peter Baume also worked to promote the proposed 'makarrata'. However, the idea did not materialise (Brennan & Crawford, 1990, p. 147).

By 1988, the year in which Australia held many public events to celebrate the 200 years since the British had landed and claimed the country for the British Empire, Prime Minister Bob Hawke noted the conference paper. Hawke summoned one of the authors, Frank Brennan, to Canberra for discussions, and eventually announced there would be a preamble for the Constitution and a version of a treaty as 'The government is committed to a real and lasting reconciliation, achieved through full consultation and honest negotiation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens of this nation'. (Hawke, as cited in de Costa, 2006, p. 151). Hawke's announcement resulted in much debate and strong opposition such that it failed to be supported. De Costa (2006) quoted the later Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Robert Tickner, in Paul Keating's government, who noted that since the idea of treaty was too hard, and thus 'the associated issues were addressed through the strategic advancement of the reconciliation process' (p. 151).

Such was the immediate history of how the idea of a treaty was superseded by the realisation of a codified and recognisable national Reconciliation process. Recommendations from the final report entitled, *Part G: Towards Reconciliation* were used to shape Reconciliation Australia's predecessor, CAR, which was a statutory body established on 2 September 1991. CAR was created in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the ensuing final report by Elliott Johnston QC (Johnston, 1991). The focus of the report, as determined by these recommendations, was on the 'process of Reconciliation' and the concepts of education and social justice. It instructed 'all political leaders and their parties recognise that Reconciliation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Australia must be achieved if community division, discord and injustice to Aboriginal people are to be avoided' (see Point 339 in Johnston, 1991).

CAR (1995) described reconciliation, as ‘a united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides social justice for all’ (p. 23), which indicated an inclusive, nationalistic tone. This way of talking about reconciliation, along with their primary focus on educating non-Indigenous people, ‘rather than towards the kinds of structural justice that Indigenous people were calling for’ (Clark, de Costa & Maddison, 2017, p. 384) meant that they were often criticised by First Peoples.

By 1996 ‘Practical Reconciliation,’ ‘a neo-assimilationist view that argued the need to concentrate on improving the socio-economic outcomes’ (Gunstone, 2008, p. 174) was realised under Prime Minister John Howard. Patrick Dodson strongly opposed this version and resigned as chairperson of CAR in protest (Behrendt, 2003). Even when CAR finished its term and Reconciliation Australia came into existence, Dodson continued to challenge the way the government was translating (formal) Reconciliation into action, with his ongoing fight for the recognition of Indigenous rights. He was especially scathing of the government intervention in the Northern Territory in 2007. In one of his responses at the time, Dodson wrote that ‘forty thousand years of a society founded upon different presuppositions to the Greco-Roman tradition and the Protestant work ethic on industrialisation is finally colliding head on with the believers of the meteor called the global market economy’ (Dodson, 2007, p. 23). Though the formal political process has been fraught and largely a compromise process for Australia’s First Nations, it remained a movement of possibilities and hope. Even Patrick Dodson, in declaring his rejection of Howard’s idea of practical reconciliation in early 2000 declared:

It’s the people’s movement and, thankfully, there are Australians who are continuing this process. They see we are in need of coming to one spirit, one view, one feeling about our position as Australians. ... Just by resorting to some social policy about health, housing and education is not going to do it. It’s about how we as people are going to feel about ourselves’ (Dodson, as cited in Keffe, 2003, p. 319).

### *Practical–Substantive Reconciliation*

As noted, CAR wanted both practical actions to occur *and* the rights of Indigenous peoples addressed in the realisation of reconciliation, which indicated that the two aspects were ‘not mutually exclusive’ (Bosnjak, Williams & Brennan, 2003, p. 122). Although reconciliation during the late-1980s and 1990s was more focused on rights (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010, p. 12), by the late-1990s, the Howard government shifted away from this towards what



became known as ‘practical reconciliation’ (Behrendt, 2003, p. 9). Howard’s practical reconciliation meant that there were now mutual obligation contracts between the government and Indigenous communities. He also ended rights-based policies and rejected the CAR’s ‘Roadmap for Reconciliation’, which had included the call for a treaty (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 67). Behrendt (2003) judged this practical reconciliation to be ‘antagonistic’ to a rights-based framework because it ignored ‘the longer term structural and institutional changes that can protect rights’ (pp. 9–11). Cronin (2007) suggested that this simply meant the ‘Westernisation of Indigenous people and any improvements to Indigenous health, housing and education will mean reconciliation is being achieved’ (p. 200).

CAR also appeared to put their focus on the education of non-Indigenous people. Short (2008) criticised CAR for creating education toolkits and yet not being able to offer further support to groups that were working towards reconciliation at a local level. Short (2008) also argued that ‘giving equal weight, at all times, to the opinions of “other” Australians (p. 130)’ the organisation was implying that First Peoples had to make the compromises and do the work to bring about reconciliation. Further, Short (2008) contended that ‘the reconciliation paradigm is founded on the premise that historical and present injustices have to be officially acknowledged by the perpetrators, their ancestors or official state representatives’ (p. 130). Given what the Howard government was doing, it was understandable that scholars like West (2000) finished off in his list of antagonist actions by the Australian governments against First Nations, which included, ‘terra nullius, segregation, assimilation, integration, self-management, self-determination’ (p. 158) with the word ‘reconciliation’.

When the CAR handed over its report at Corroboree 2000, not only did Prime Minister John Howard refuse to give an official apology for past injustices on behalf of the nation, he also ‘rubbed salt into the wound’ (Houston, Martin & McLaren, as cited in Ahluwalia et al., 2012, p. 128) by announcing that a new private body, Reconciliation Australia, would replace the government-supported body. This was one of the organisations that benefitted from cuts to what was once the federal Indigenous budget but now was being channelled into organisations ‘to benefit *all* (my emphasis) Australians’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 73).

### ***1.3.2.3 Twenty-first century Reconciliation***

By the 21st century, the various expressions of Reconciliation in Australia made it difficult to ascertain a single definition. It is helpful to accept that Australian Reconciliation is not one

thing, but rather ‘a complex set of projects: such as truth-telling, forms of remembrance/memorialisation, education programs in civil society and legal processes that are inflected by notions of restorative justice, reparations, repair, apology rather than persecution, incrimination and confrontation’ (Hattam et al., 2005, as cited in Hattam & Matthews, 2012, p. 13), alongside the notion of reconciliation as an emerging ‘social imaginary’ (Hattam & Matthews, 2012, p. 13), then there are several options for how to enact it. It is noteworthy that, unlike places like South Africa, ‘truth-telling’ was never a part of the formal Australian national Reconciliation process (Fleay & Judd, 2019) though First Nations have been calling for this for many years. Now that the Canadians since 2015, as noted earlier, have had this concept as part of their formal Reconciliation process, it may also become a more populist notion in Australia. Indeed, truth-telling was the theme for the 2019 National Reconciliation Week (Reconciliation Australia, 2019).

In terms of the broader Australian community, Clark et al (2017) suggested that the ‘top down generalist national approach’(p.383) to reconciliation could be at fault for significant numbers of non-Indigenous people who though interested in engaging with Indigenous people, lacked the cultural capability to actually engage. They critiqued the national reconciliation framework as having minimal success (Clark et al., 2017). Based on the 2016 Reconciliation Barometer, Reconciliation Australia (2017) would probably disagree, as they found ‘that the majority of Australians maintain positive attitudes towards reconciliation’ (p. 3), but conceded that ‘disappointingly, there is significant evidence that these positive attitudes have yet to translate into improved behaviours across a wide range of sectors in Australian society, including the workplace, law-enforcement agencies and the education and community sectors’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2017, p. 3). However, to confirm the findings by Clark et al (2017), the 2018 Reconciliation Barometer noted that even though 54% of non-Indigenous people surveyed would like to support reconciliation, only 29% knew what to do about this (Reconciliation Australia, 2019, p. 9)

There are those who remain doubtful about the national movement. Discourses of reconciliation, such as the Recognise campaign and the Referendum Council, show how reconciliation often reflects “‘a well-meaning, non-Indigenous project to manage the colonial past as it spills into the present’”. Equally, it makes visible the ongoing insistence by many Indigenous people that the ‘unfinished business of colonialism is not going to go away’ (Elder, 2017, p. 91).

In a call to action, as part of the annual ANU Reconciliation Lecture in 2018, one of Australia's most senior First Nations men, Peter Yu, despondently critiqued the reconciliation process as being aimless and without meaning:

Reconciliation has lost its moral and political gravitas. While I know and believe sections of the general community remain committed to the concept and aspiration of Reconciliation, it has become a nebulous and meaningless term and used by anyone as a throwaway concept to apply their interpretation about the relationship between Indigenous people and the Australian State. It has become part of Australia's lazy dialogue concerning Indigenous people dominated by symbolism which has little connection with the realities of people's lives (Yu, 2018).

*'Reconciliation Australia' today—a brief observation*

Again, Reconciliation Australia would probably disagree with Yu's negative assessment. Their appraisal is more positive and advocates for their services and resources, linking much of the success of reconciliation back to the RAP program. For example, their 2018 RAP Barometer Report makes comments like 'since 2016, more Australians, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians, believe it is possible for us to become united'(Reconciliation Australia, 2019d, p. 3). During 2018, the Reconciliation Australia website appeared to become more engaging and offered commentary on current events. When the Hon Ken Wyatt became the first Indigenous person to be appointed to lead the federal government's Indigenous portfolio, the Chief Executive Officer of Reconciliation Australia, Karen Mundine, commented that this was a:

Confidence-booster for the vast majority of Australians who support our vision for a truly just, equitable and reconciled Australia—according to the latest Australian Reconciliation Barometer, 90% of Australians believe the relationship between First Peoples and other Australians is important (Reconciliation Australia, 2019c).

The broad explanation for reconciliation and the RAPs offered by Reconciliation Australia (2016) focuses on relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians and addressed 'broader questions about our national identity and the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories cultures and rights in our nation's story' (p. 3). RA states that over the years since they evolved from CAR, their definition of reconciliation has now 'taken a holistic approach that encompasses rights, as well as so-called symbolic and practical actions' (Reconciliation Australia, 2016, p. 3). Their explanation for

Reconciliation has five dimensions: race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, historical acceptance and unity. Each of these ‘dimensions’ is defined with a stated goal and one broad action. This includes the action, under institutional integrity, to ‘create a wider range of opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2019e). This explanation is now integral to the framework of all RAPs and is clear on their website.

## **1.4 History of RAPs**

The origin of RAPs can be traced to the outcomes of the Australian Reconciliation Convention in May 1997, and the ensuing discussions in CAR (1999) that included the statement on their website that one of the components for the National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process was work to eventually achieve: ‘By 2001, Commonwealth, State and Territory Parliaments pass formal motions of support for the Document for Reconciliation including measures to include provisions about agreements in legislation’ (CAR, 1999). There is further evidence such a paper by the Chairperson Evelyn Scott AO asking ‘whether reconciliation would be advanced by a formal document or documents of reconciliation’ (Scott, 1998). As there was never one formal document created at a national government level, such discussions may have been the impetus for the RAP program that was subsequently announced by Reconciliation Australia, who activated the first RAP in July 2006, to ‘maintain the reconciliation momentum’ (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010, p. 6).

Prof Tom Calma AO, the co-chair of Reconciliation Australia, explained to me his involvement in the origin of RAPs:

I saw it when they [RAPs] first started. I was Social Justice Commissioner at the time. I saw the value and got behind wanting to improve it. It was quite an interesting issue because in 2005, I launched my social justice report, a chapter of that, was addressed to Closing the Gap. It was health inequality gaps we had to address ... in 2006, we formed the Close the Gap campaign. Then in 2006, RAPs got started. They, in turn, adopted the Close the Gap. So it was about addressing health inequality. That’s really the nucleus of what a RAP was about.

### **1.4.1 RAPs from their inception to now**

The RAPs had their strategic roots in the key principles developed by Reconciliation Australia, which have changed little over the years. Therefore, the explanation for what they

are, belongs to that organisation. The definition for a RAP in 2015 was ‘a business plan that turns good intentions into actions. A RAP publicly formalises an organisation’s contribution to Reconciliation by identifying clear actions with realistic targets’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2013). In 2019, the definition for a RAP was ‘a strategic document that supports an organisation’s business plan. It includes practical actions that will drive an organisation’s contribution to reconciliation both internally and in the communities in which it operates’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2019a).

In 2019, Reconciliation Australia stated on their website that the terms ‘Reconciliation Action Plan’ and ‘RAP’ are ‘*valued trademarks* of Reconciliation Australia. We are proud to share the RAP logo with organisations that work with us through our feedback and quality assurance process to develop a RAP that meets quality requirements’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2019a).

The template for a RAP had evolved by 2013 to allow organisations to choose between four levels of RAPs: reflect, innovate, stretch or elevate. These four RAP models had different criteria and Reconciliation Australia, advise and eventually give their approval as to which level is most appropriate given what that organisation is proposing for their RAP. Reconciliation Australia (2019a) is also clear on their website that ‘organisations, schools or early learning services that choose not to be a part of Reconciliation Australia’s RAP programs should not use the words “Reconciliation Action Plan”, “RAP”’.

#### ***1.4.1.1 RAPs and corporate social responsibility***

There is no commonly accepted definition for corporate social responsibility (CSR) due to differing cultural and community contexts. However, a relevant description of CSR for the Australian context is that it is about ‘what companies do in order to be socially responsible’ (Black, 2006, p. 25). In relation to this research, universities use CSR to name how they will build better relationships with and provide career opportunities for Indigenous Australians. This has led many organisations to articulate the concept of Reconciliation into their CSR programs, which is often evidenced by a RAP. Reconciliation Australia began promoting RAPs as tools to enact this aspect of organisations and, as universities too have become more corporatised, it appears that RAPs should fit into their strategic governance and planning frameworks.

#### ***1.4.1.2 RAPs and CSR in universities***

When I began my research in 2014, there were only eight universities with RAPs, which made questions related to RAP impact on universities a noteworthy aspect of the proposed research. According to the list given on the ‘Who has a RAP?’ web page (Reconciliation Australia, 2019a), in April 2019 there were only 10 universities with RAPs. Although RAPs may not change organisational structures, Maddison (2017) noted that they are ‘a rare example of economic elites demonstrating preparedness to engage with questions of reconciliation and socio-economic redistribution’ (p. 162), which provides other ‘economic elites’ with good practices to emulate. Such practices in universities regarding social justice, social inclusion and notions of equality and equity combine to evolve into what could be called CSR, of which the RAP is an expression.

This research explored how RAPs in universities had been included as part of doing their CSR in their business aware that ‘because reconciliation is vulnerable to ideological and market conditions [it] is ultimately freighted in the direction of appeasing mainstream white society’ (Houston, Martin & McLaren, 2012, p. 120). Given that only some universities had RAPs, yet all display evidence of CSR in their relationships and good intentions regarding First Nations students, scholars and community, questions about RAP usage need to be asked. Although RAPs can be evidence of CSR, universities also have public-facing strategic plans, sophisticated websites, social media platforms and other forms of community engagement and presenting themselves. Further, universities have additional evidence of delivering on their CSR that other businesses may not have, such as successful First Nation students, scholars and alumni along with written and visual evidence in publications and research projects.

Universities are also large corporations, which may aim to be perceived as good corporate citizens by conforming with other large non-educational organisations in the display of their CSR (Banerjee, 2008). RAPs allow universities to be comparable with other businesses, even if the extent to which universities meet RAP targets is mostly unknown and there are no consequences for failing to meet or report on targets. So though a RAP can be named as evidence of a whole-of–university approach to First Peoples education (Buckskin et al, 2018, p. 46) this ‘evidence gap’ aspect of the RAP was also noted as a key weakness in the Buckskin et al report (2018, p. 148).

The discourse employed in RAPs is a mixture of ‘management speak’ with words such as ‘governance, capacity building, partnerships, whole of government, benchmarks, stakeholders leadership, targets, measurable, outcomes, role models’ (Sutton, 2009, p. 209), alongside words such as ‘deep respect’ (ANU) and words in the local First Nations language (Curtin). For Sutton (2009), Reconciliation is all about relationships and this research investigated if and how, relationships, along with ‘respect’ and ‘opportunities’ (e.g., Reconciliation Australia, 2013) were aspects of the RAP ethnographies of Australian universities.

#### **1.4.2 Need for further research on RAPs**

While research into policies affecting Indigenous peoples is plentiful, there is minimal research on RAP documents and the processes undertaken to produce them. Apart from a report booklet commissioned by Reconciliation Australia (Stolper, Wyatt & McKenna, 2012), a paper about RAPs in the construction industry (Heard et al., 2017) and long-term work by Gunstone (2005, 2009, 2012), in which RAPs are included as part of the critique of the reconciliation process in Australia, there is limited research on the impact of RAPs.

#### **1.4.3 Background to the four university RAPs**

RAP documents are artefacts that require research, in which the document design, positioning on university websites, narratives regarding the documents and the words are analysed. A desktop audit is an inadequate method of determining the shape and place of RAPs in any one of the institutions but it is one of the indicators of its place. Table 1.1 provides a brief description of the four key RAP documents, using information from the Reconciliation Australia (2019a) website as well as university websites in January 2016 and January 2018. Detailed information about the RAPs is provided in Chapter 5.

**Table 1.1: Overview of RAPs**

University	Reconciliation Statement (Date signed)	RAP (#1) (Year implemented)	Current RAP (if different to RAP #1)	RAP Responsible officer (January 2016 and July 2018)
Curtin	18 March 1998	2008	2014–2017 Current draft: 2018–2021	2016 DVCA, Prof Jill Downie  2018 Two co-chairs of RAP: Elder in Residence and Director of Ethics, Equity and Social Justice in portfolio of DVCA
ANU	Apology Document: 13 February 2008	2009	2017–2021	2016 Director of National Centre for Indigenous Studies (at the time Prof Michael Dodson)  2018 PVC (University Experience) Prof Richard Baker
Melb	16 June 2010	2011	2018–2022 (& others)	2016 Director, Burrup Barak Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development, Prof Ian Anderson  2018 A/Director, Burrup Barak Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development. Mr Charles O’Leary & Margot Eden, Associate Director, Indigenous Strategy and Social Inclusion. May 2018 Professor Shaun Ewen (Chair), Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Indigenous
UoN	2017 Reconciliation statement on website	2011	No RAP	2016 Director, Indigenous Students Support, Employment & Collaboration) Leanne Holt and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Academic & Global Relations, Darrell Evans  No RAP in 2018

In 2016, UoN referred on its website to reconciliation as being part of its DNA and driving the university’s strategic plans. Curtin had the RAP sitting alongside other plans and was not mentioned in the strategic plan until 2017. ANU’s RAPs evolved from their *Apology to all Indigenous Peoples* media release in February 2008, which supported and echoed the National Apology by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. The ANU website had several subsidiary RAPs that sat alongside other plans, and from the time of the first RAP, it was named in the strategic plan. Melb made a ‘Statement of Commitment’ to the process of creating a RAP in June 2010 and duly published their first RAP the following year.

## 1.5 Thesis outline

Besides Chapter 5, in which words from the four RAPS are cited, each chapter is prefaced by words from the interviewees.

Chapter 1 has provided the research problem and the reasons why I engaged in this project. A brief history of the concept of reconciliation was followed by some of the key aspects of



Australian reconciliation, including the story about the RAPs. Key terminology, largely based on the Australian context was also presented and the four university RAPs were introduced.

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature relevant to the exploration of RAPs and reconciliation within universities. The chapter begins with a discussion of philosophies that informed the research and also examines some key international and local documents that provided context and background to the RAP stories in the universities.

Chapter 3 details the policy ethnographic research methodology used for this study, which was embedded in reconciliatory practice overlaid by Dadirri and 'Boodjah Neh'. This policy ethnography consists of three key elements: RAP documents, interviews and a self-study, which were all used as methods for data collection. The chapter then details the process of data analyses and strategies utilised from grounded theory related to the three intertwined methods. The ethical considerations when conducting such a study are also outlined.

Chapter 4 builds on Chapter 3 in that it expounds on the research methodology of the self-study, and describes the evolution of a new form of self-study: the Refractive Reconciliatory Self-study (RRS).

Chapter 5 describes the findings, which cover the main themes elicited from the policy ethnography. These themes include the key understanding that reconciliation in universities is a problematic concept existing on a continuum and that the RAP was judged as a tool, which was not always the best way to enable reconciliation.

Chapter 6 contains an analysis of the findings regarding reconciliation that can be mapped on a Reconciliation Spiralling Continuum (RSC). The RAPs are demonstrated to be useful but not essential and can occasionally become restrictive. South–West Indigenist theory (SWIT) is utilised to explain the process of reconciliation within Australian universities.

Chapter 7 concludes with a comment about this project's contribution to scholarship, including the hybrid RRS research method and the synergistic theory, SWIT. The chapter provides recommendations for universities to undertake further work on meaningful reconciliation into the future and suggests further research that could enable this to happen.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

In summary, this study aimed to analyse the university RAP—‘how the policy is lived on the ground, its ethnographic presence in the communities it is intended to serve’ (Ma Rhea, 2011, p. 63)—and in so doing, glean insights into Australian university reconciliation stories. My objective was to explore why RAPs appear to be problematic within the university sector. The larger purpose was to find ways to explain RAP related reconciliation challenges in universities by listening to what people associated with RAPs, especially senior First Nations people, were saying about how we, including me, could better enable reconciliation within the sector into the future. I have provided a brief history of the formal process of Australian reconciliation, noting it was, and is still in 2019, a political compromise. This all serves as a helpful backdrop for the ensuing review of relevant literature.

## **2. Literature review**

It's about taking the knowledge of our ancestors and what's been passed on for us in the past and building on that knowledge and ensuring that our knowledge continues to be built on (Dr Leanne Holt).

I was always desperate to learn whatever I could to help my students understand things from other perspectives. I found that all of the textbooks, everything that I was using to teach the students, any lecture notes that have been handed over from predecessors and so on, everything I could find. It was all American-centric, basically and to a lesser extent, Eurocentric. But could I find anything in terms of Aboriginal people? ... Do you think I could find anything from an Indigenous perspective? (A/Prof Michele Fleming).

### **2.1 Introducing the review**

The literature abounds with explanations for the concept of formal or political Reconciliation, which has been extensively explored since the mid-20th century, and has been explained within the context of nations finding ways to live in peace following armed conflict. Given there is no nominated historical date for the cessation of armed conflict between the First Peoples of Australia and the first colonialists and later settlers, the formal political reconciliation process initiated during the 1980s as noted in Chapter 1, has its own peculiarities. This literature review builds on the definitions presented in the first chapter to cover two broad areas: first the theories and philosophies that help appraise reconciliation and RAPs, and secondly, Australian university narratives regarding Reconciliation and RAPs. Within these themes, I assess significant documents that informed university reconciliation. Chapter 6 contains discussion about other literature linked to the data analysis.

### **2.2 Theories and philosophies to appraise reconciliation and RAPs**

As noted in Chapter 1, several scholars have explored the concept of reconciliation, which has a degree of 'semantic ambivalence' (Nicoll, 2004, p. 17). This observation provided a useful starting point for my project because it was relevant to both formal and informal reconciliation and did not make assumptions about forgiveness or resolution being part of the idea. Notwithstanding the complexity of the concept, scholars of peace and conflict studies, history, psychology and theology among others, have proffered theories and written extensively about the enactment of reconciliation processes over decades. To help inform the

context for this project, I reviewed the following theorists, but also advise the reader that there are further pertinent theories explored in Chapter 6 during my analysis of the findings.

### **2.2.1 Peace building and relationships**

Lederach (1997, p. 24), in articulating a conceptual framework for peace building, argued for the significance of the relational aspects of reconciliation. For him, reconciliation is not about head because it is more about heart, and he explained a version of reconciliation that revolves around 'relationship', which has four components: truth, mercy, justice and peace (Lederach, 1997, p. 30). These components were based on his lived experience in Central America and his work as a member of a Mennonite Central committee and a negotiator between the Sandinista government and the Yatama, a Nicaraguan Indigenous resistance movement. However, Lederach (1997, p. 30) described reconciliation as both a focus and a locus and its connections to the relational aspects of conflict, which is useful when considering the artefact of RAPs within the Australian reconciliation process. For Lederach (1997), the process was essential because it sought 'innovative ways to create a time and place, within various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present' (p. 35).

In a later book, Lederach and Lederach (2011) further developed the idea to acknowledge and question how communities can heal from violence that results in deep often unspoken pain. In their explanation of reconciliation, the authors referred to the broadening of definitions over time to incorporate the political explanation for reconciliation. This political context allowed for 'some form of enmity accommodation, a coexistence necessary to control the bitterness of entrenched divisions in favour of a reasoned peace' (Lederach & Lederach, 2011, p. 3). They noted how there had been 'an extraordinary explosion of programs and initiatives' (p. 4) being labelled as 'reconciliation' and cautioned that some were not quite reconciliation. However, they also commented, by referring to Martin Luther King that this all indicated the human need for working 'towards healthier human relationships' and a 'beloved community (King's concept)' (Lederach & Lederach, 2011, p. 4).

In the broader sense, formal political Reconciliation is referred to as 'political behaviour, aimed in part at achieving some form of forgiveness or reconciliation with a group who have been wronged' (Hughes, 2011, p. 827). However, the introduction of the concept of forgiveness is controversial because many believe this to be a personal state or aspect not

essential to Reconciliation. Crocker (1999, p. 60) defined reconciliation as ranging from ‘thinner’ to ‘thicker’, in which the thinner is about ‘simple coexistence’, which can imply a ‘willingness to hear each other out’ and to ‘build on areas of common concern’ or more robust conceptions of reconciliation, such as the truth commissions in Chile and South Africa. This latter concept includes forgiveness and mercy rather than justice. It is the definition used by Brounéus (2003) that offers a pertinent explanation for this project it is based on broad research of the concept of formal reconciliation as it has been expressed around the world:

Reconciliation is a societal process that involves mutual acknowledgment of past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and behaviour into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace. In other words, reconciliation mainly focuses on remembering, changing and continuing with life in peace. Reconciliation does not require forgetting, forgiving, or loving one another (p. 20).

Instead of Lederach and Lederach’s (2011) ‘reasoned’ peace, Brounéus (2003) suggested that reconciliation is about a ‘sustainable’ peace, which was based on a review of literature and reconciliation projects. She noted that reconciliation is a process that occurs after an armed conflict and at a societal level (Brounéus, 2003), which confirms that this definition allows for the articulation of practical processes that enable groups who were once at war with one another to move forward into the future in peace. Brounéus (2008, p. 309) completed a study about reconciliation within Rwanda and Mozambique, which found that informal and local reconciliation initiatives appeared to be more successful than formal national reconciliation initiatives.

### **2.2.2 Personal versus political reconciliation**

Among those who question the value of a formal Reconciliation process is Sutton (2009), who challenged the expression of Reconciliation in Australia, and throughout the world. Sutton (2009) believed in personal reconciliation rather than a collective formal, political form of Reconciliation. He viewed Reconciliation as messing with authentic possibilities of the process, which for him were essentially about relationships; everything else was simply ‘Orwellian managerial—performative—hollow tainted and almost completely a lie’ (Sutton, 2009, p. 196). The other noteworthy commentary from Sutton (2009) was his understanding that ‘in Aboriginal languages there is no word for “sorry”, in the sense of a self-accusing apology, although there are interjections of regret, of the “oops” variety’ (p. 200). He referred

to various words that were connected to the concept of sorry, which regarded ‘feeling sorry for somebody’, empathy or compassion. Given the number of First Nation languages and the dynamic quality of languages, I question whether it is possible for him to substantiate this claim. Although Sutton (2009) noted that we do not need the same language or a shared schema to have what he called ‘moral equivalence’(p. 201), it could make it more complex for peoples who have foundations in different knowledge systems to negotiate ideas such as Reconciliation.

In contrast to Sutton, Kohen (2009) stated that it *is* possible to have ‘political Reconciliation’ without personal reconciliation. He used the example of Nelson Mandela, who ‘embraced restorative practices while seeking to separate forgiveness and two distinct types of Reconciliation—personal and political—from one another’ (Kohen, 2009, p. 400) because they are ‘different concepts’. Political Reconciliation involves groups rather than individuals and therefore, a state of reconciliation is achievable even if this has not occurred on the individual personal level. Kohen’s (2009) appraisal of the concept of ‘forgiveness’ included how forgiveness is about empowerment and victims reclamation of power (p. 404). Further, Kohen (2009) explained that it is ‘necessary that political Reconciliation is both a public apology and forgiveness, though the order in which those take place is less important than it might appear’ (p. 414), which links to Kevin Rudd’s public apology to the Stolen Generation—a symbolic gesture that counteracted the previous government’s refusal to apologise for anything and instead focus on ‘practical reconciliation’ (Gunstone, 2008, p. 174). Kohen concluded by referring to Desmond Tutu in South Africa and invoking people to engage in personal reconciliation subsequent to the public display of political Reconciliation.

### **2.2.3 Dadirri and Boodjah Neh**

The concept of Dadirri is significant to my methodology. Ungunmerr-Baumann (1988) is credited with first publishing words about this concept, but it was others such as Atkinson (2002) who explained it as a concept for research methodology and West, Stewart, Foster and Usher (2012) who endorsed Dadirri within the context of health research methodology related to Indigenous people. All scholars acknowledge that Ungunmerr-Baumann promoted Dadirri for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Though only the ANU RAP explicitly included words about listening, but it is a critical aspect of this project.

As this thesis is written on the lands of the Wadjuk Noongar and to capture my intention to ground the analysis process and any emanating theories in the country where it was conducted, I have augmented Dadirri with ‘boodjah neh’. These Wadjuk words are an Indigenous On-Country pedagogy, which was named by Curtin’s Wadjuk Elder in Residence, Professor Simon Forrest (Johnston & Forrest, in review) and are a call to ‘listen to the land’. Forrest chose these words to describe a concept that he evolved over many years of teaching university students and others On-Country. The On-Country units are assessed and part of accredited university courses. Kennedy et al. (2019) confirmed the importance of First Nations people shaping curriculum based On-Country, which was evidenced in these units offered at Curtin since 2014. In 2019, there were three On-Country units, all created, shaped and delivered by First Nations On-Country. Professor Forrest, a Reconciliation Elder, talked to me for this project about how reconciliation was important to his teaching over the years.

To reflect and analyse reconciliation in this project, I have further augmented Boodjah Neh, with my understanding of ‘nyinanginy’, which is the act to ‘continue sitting’ (Whitehurst, 1997, p. 33)—which is what I am doing as write these words. The word associated with listening is connected to the word that relates to learning: ‘kadadjiny’, which means ‘thinking, listening, learning’ (Whitehurst, 1997, p. 9). The use of Boodjah Neh together with these other Noongar words, elegantly reflects the refractive threads of the methodology of this study. The understanding of belonging to the land—of being one with it—is something that could be considered as ‘ontologically basic’ to First Nations (Whitt, Roberts, Norman & Grieves, 2001, p. 714), or as Moreton-Robinson (2003) explained, our ‘ontological relationship to land, marks a radical, indeed incommensurable, difference between us and the non-Indigenous’ (p. 31).

#### **2.2.4 Southern theory**

Boodjah Neh and Dadirri hold the essence of the idea of place, whereas Southern theory provides a tether to capture the broader concept of place on the planet. Southern theory is concerned with the Global South, in places with colonial legacies, and challenges the hegemony of the Global North in terms of university knowledge creation (Connell, 2017). Southern theory provides useful questions for the ways in which Indigenous knowledges are included and given precedence, or not, as part of reconciliation. Australian education has a ‘Eurocentric curriculum almost everywhere’ (Connell, 2017, p. 6) and Australian universities

continue to aspire via ranking tables to the elite universities of the Global North, with their elite knowledges. That these universities mostly reside in Europe and the USA, is important to note when researching Australian universities in the Global South. A key tenet of Southern theory regards the knowledges and experiences created as part of the ‘colonial encounter’ (Connell, 2017, p. 9). The lived experiences of everyday activities in Australian universities can be explained by Southern theory. This theory also utilises the concept of ‘curricular justice’, which attempts to redress the colonial legacy and ‘prioritize the interests of the least advantaged groups of students’ (Connell, 2017, p. 11), to improve the education of First Nations students.

### **2.2.5 The ‘place’ of reconciliation**

The concepts of place and space proved to be important during the data analysis for this study. Galbraith, (2014) discussed how space could be found for—that is, opportunities for—reconciliation within planning projects. This research advocates for making space for reconciliation as part of the planning process because it ‘raises the analytical lens from within a planning space to the institutional level so that attention can be paid to the conditions under which opportunity structures change and are accessed’ (Galbraith, 2014, p. 457).

For First Nations, there have been many allusions in conversations about places for conversations, people and knowledges. Dudgeon and Fielder (2006) provided a comprehensive historical explanation regarding the philosophies of the concepts of place and space. Their explanation of place connects to findings that indicate where strategies like the RAP could or should be placed. The authors positioned the conversation about place in spaces within discussions about colonisation and stated that ‘this distinction of space/tactics and place/strategies translates well into the colonial context—whether the dispossessed have no choice other than making some “space” in a “place” now owned and controlled by the colonisers’ (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006, p. 399). This applies to how First Peoples and matters related to them— often labelled as reconciliation matters in universities with a RAP—find space within the designated equity spaces in universities.

An extension to the concept of place is the idea of ‘post-normal reconciliation’ suggested by Arabena (2010), who argued that while ‘normal’ reconciliation is about people resolving their relationships, this can be difficult for many First Peoples, who feel they are being asked to ‘be conciliatory to the “colonial project” in this country’ (p. 5). Conversely, post-normal



includes a broader more ecological idea of reconciling with the planet—it is ‘not only to reconcile between Indigenous peoples and fellow Australians, but to reconcile us all with the natural systems in which we live and to reconcile with other species with whom we spend our time on Earth’ (Arabena, 2010, p. 6).

### **2.2.6 Critical race theory and critical pedagogy**

Critical race theory (CRT) maintains that our societies are divided along the concept of race, in terms of black and white, in which white people hold the privilege and power as the oppressors and black people are disempowered victims. CRT evolved during the 1970s within the USA’s civil rights movement (Bell, 1980) and has something to offer discussions about places in which the majority of the population is white and the subordinated minority group is of colour. However, CRT is not an adequate theory to explain the complexities of the situation studied here because it is so strongly focused on colour and on the American context. CRT offers some insights for scholars to explore a sustainable integration of Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011) and it affords a lens for appraising the decolonisation of universities. For example, McLaughlin and Whatman (2011) use CRT to assess the various attempts at their university over time to integrate Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum and they propose a framework to achieve this for the future. In much the same way, I have appraised the reconciliation process with the view to progress into the future. As they so aptly note, ‘Indigenous people’s knowledge systems have existed long before the “gaze” of the coloniser, Indigenous identity, knowledge and perspectives exist outside of, as well as within, the coloniser/colonised cultural interface’ (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011, p. 367).

Additionally, critical pedagogy is a tool used to observe power relations between teachers and students and the version assessed here was based on the work of Freire (1970) because it also informed and helped shape both some of the questions used in the data gathering process (e.g., does a RAP have any connection to education?) and the analysis process. Freire (1970) wrote of a ‘revolutionary leadership’ that must ‘practice co-intentional education’ to liberate the oppressed (p. 43). He further added the concept of ‘cultural invasion’, which is when ‘the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter’s potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression’ (Freire, 1970, p. 125). This helps to

explain the state of Australia's First Nations and their knowledges within the university system. Young's (1990) argument against the 'ideal of assimilation' (p. 157) also helps to define the social justice that incorporates equality but is respectful of group differences. Young (1990) argued that 'equality as the participation and inclusion of all groups sometimes requires different treatment for oppressed or disadvantaged groups' (p. 158) in its endeavours to achieve social justice, which she reiterated is a social justice based on the 'Western welfare capitalist' (Young, 1990, p. 257) version. These ideas informed the rationale for the research project, however, they do not capture the findings and results.

The central tenet of Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy is that it challenges 'banking education' and instead intrinsically supports an education space that enables people to learn and research together in what could be considered a reconciled way. Banking education is described as the antithesis of the formal Australian reconciliation process, with its RAP-related pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities. This education 'resists dialogue ... inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human' (Freire, 1970 pp. 56–57). Instead, Freire (1970) advocated for 'problem-posing education' because it 'regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality' (pp. 56–57). This not only supports the RAP pillars, but also the current Reconciliation Australia description of the five dimensions of reconciliation, which includes 'truth-telling' within the historical acceptance dimension (Reconciliation Australia, 2017).

#### **2.2.6.1 CRT according to others**

Another helpful view of CRT by a Kungarakkan scholar, Larkin (2015) argued:

In my mind, CRT provides an exciting opportunity for the Indigenous academy to develop theoretical and practice-oriented frameworks to not only critique existing institutions in their management of dysfunctional race dynamics, but also presents a field of potential to instigate academic and corporate culture change within the academy (p. 50).

Further, Larkin (2015) advocated the use of the CRT framework by the tertiary sector because it 'requires systemic transformation in order to better understand the effects of racism within its institutions' (p. 46). Additionally, he raised the issue of the constant struggle

that Indigenous leaders experience while trying to bring attention to Indigenous education matters (Larkin, 2015).

The concept of ‘white-stream’ rather than mainstream, appears to have been used in feminist literature (e.g., Grande, 2003) to make more accurate summations of feminism that were aligned to the colonial narrative, which fits well within university contexts and in a similar way is dominated by white middle-class people whose Western ways are privileged and clearly dominate our current university systems. Bunda, Zipin and Brennan (2012) confirmed that Indigenous people run up against forbidding walls of university white-stream (Anderson, 2009, as cited in Bunda et al., 2012, p. 942) ‘normality’. This project’s findings noted references to First Nations people being part of either the ‘mainstream’ or ‘the centre’, in which the concept of ‘main’ clearly means that all else is ‘othered’ or ‘secondary’.

The idea of institutional racism or ‘professional racism’ (Gay, 2010, p. 240) is another aspect that allows for framing an explanation of activities within universities. Gay (2010) noted that ‘teachers of colour should assume the primary responsibility and by extension blame, for the achievement of students from their own ethnic groups’ (p. 241), which is something that we need to be mindful to not allow in Australian universities, especially given their Indigenous centres.

CRT also informed the design of the policy ethnography used in this study (see Chapter 3). CRT involves social justice precepts that ‘require looking at both realities and ideals. Thus, contested meanings of “shoulds” and “oughts” come into play’ (Charmaz, 2014, p. 326). This tension of ideals versus realities were constants when exploring reconciliation in university environments.

#### **2.2.6.2     *Critical pedagogy’s definition of reconciliation***

Within the critical pedagogy context, reconciliation has a restorative aspect to it, as it is ‘a psychosocial and pedagogical intervention that aims to heal the effects of traumatic events; the spiralling guilt, anxiety, resentment and senses of injustice that distort individual, national and global well-being’ (Hattam, 2012, p. xv). Hattam added examples of reconciliation projects, including the CAR in Australia, which allowed for places of healing and that ‘third space in which “new” cross-cultural discourses can be elaborated’ (p. xv).

Bhabha's (1988) much-quoted reference to the 'third space' (p. 22) expressed in his response to the 1986 Edinburgh International Film Festival provides a nuanced and helpful explanation for the reconciliation interactions in my research. Bhabha (1988) noted that 'it is significant that the productive capacities of this third space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance' (p. 22). He also referred to the idea of culture having 'hybridity', which implied for this research context, that there is rarely a discrete, dualistic notion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, but rather a blurred line of distinction. This concept is further explored in Chapter 3.

### **2.2.6.3     *Reconciliation pedagogy***

Critical pedagogy then provides a broader framework and 'emancipatory social vision' (Hattam, 2012, p. xv) for what is known as 'reconciliation pedagogy'. Although the text, *Reconciliation and Pedagogy* (Ahluwalia et al., 2012) allowed for the exploration of this concept from many different angles and by its various authors, the basic concept 'focuses attention on the pedagogical and political dimensions of reconciliation and the aim of non-violent social and political transformation common to both' (Hattam et al., 2012, p. 4). The resulting chapters serve to inspire educators to think about their work through a reconciliation lens. Just like the authors of this text, the participants in my research project also articulated their understandings of reconciliation and their 'understanding of the dynamics of reconciling practices' (Hattam et al., 2012, p. 4), except they have done it specifically from the campuses and communities connected to their universities. These author-educators challenged their peers to rethink and revitalise education as they called for a 'politics of hope in dangerous times' (Hattam et al., 2012, p. 7).

Much has been done to unpack how reconciliation can be enacted through the process of learning, teaching and the curriculum more broadly. Scholars (e.g. Ahluwalia et al, 2012; Ma Rhea, 2011; Hattam & Matthews, 2012; Zembylas, 2011) have researched, written and theorised in this space indicating that there is a rich resource available for our universities to help them enact reconciliation through curriculum. Although it can be a nuanced space, reconciliation pedagogy within this higher education environment can provide frameworks for transformative ways of working and learning for students, staff and associated communities. As the authors noted, such a framework is rarely used or reflected upon, so they challenge educators to give more prominence to this way of educating in the classroom,

because ‘pedagogy in this book refers to those practices of knowledge (re)production that enable us to live in the world and maintain our relationships with others’(Hattam, Atkinson & Bishop, 2012, p. 5) .

### **2.2.7 Indigenous rights and substantive reconciliation**

In Australia we are on a discovery journey. We haven’t got anywhere near a reconciliation agenda. Our people are over symbolism, they want rights, reciprocity, the recognition of Australian’s racism. We see that the journey is growing and that more people want to understand and recognise the first Australians (Buckskin, 2017).

So declared Prof Peter Buckskin at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) in July 2017, reminding everyone that for reconciliation to occur, First Nations need, and demand, a reconciliation built on rights. As already mentioned, during the time when Prime Ministers Howard and then Rudd advocated for practical and symbolic reconciliation, First Nations leaders were advocating for substantive reconciliation because they have always wanted that these aspects of rights and power relations be addressed (Gunstone, 2008, p. 174). As Burridge (2007, 2009) noted, ‘substantive’ also referred to as ‘true’ reconciliation and with Indigenous Rights, includes the concepts of sovereignty and compensation and ‘whilst community support for reconciliation remains high, the federal Government’s support for “practical reconciliation”—with its primary focus on overcoming Indigenous disadvantage—has meant that important questions about the rights of Indigenous Australians have been left unanswered’ (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 3). The definition of Reconciliation can also be extended to hold the human rights perspective, which in turn brings in the concept of justice, in which ‘Reconciliation is based on Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians coming to an honest understanding of our shared history, a commitment to building cooperative partnerships based on trust and respect and a recognition of the distinctive rights of Indigenous peoples’ (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013, p. 3).

Here are some further ideas from scholars about Indigenous rights in this context.

#### **2.2.7.1 ‘Reconciliation typologies’ and sovereignty**

First Nations scholar, Burridge (2009) advocated that the only way forward for reconciliation following Rudd’s apology was through the realisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander rights. Burrridge's (2009, p. 116) 'reconciliation typologies' are named on a continuum, with one end labelled as 'rights-based', the centre labelled as 'symbolic' and the other end is 'assimilationist', which makes it pertinent to use in the assessment of university RAP frameworks. Burrridge (2009, p. 117) also cited Michael Dodson's Corroboree 2000 speech, during which in response to Prime Minister Howard's promotion of 'practical reconciliation', Dodson reminded people that all that was being promised were basic human rights to which everyone was already entitled. Dodson was clear that Reconciliation was much more significant:

Don't be distracted by notions of practical reconciliation because they mean practically nothing now. Also issues of health housing and education of Indigenous Australians are of course key concern to us as a nation, they are not issues that are at the very heart or the very soul of reconciliation. But they are, to put it quite simply and plainly, the entitlements every Australian should enjoy ... Reconciliation is about deeper things, to do with nation, soul and spirit. Reconciliation is about the blood and flesh of the lives we must lead together and not the nuts and bolts of the entitlements as citizens we should enjoy (Dodson, 27 May 2000).

Burrridge (2003) rightly labelled that version of the process as 'a hoax and a lot of false pretences' (p. 69, as cited in Burrridge, 2009, p. 119). A further aspect of 'rights' is the associated aspect of sovereignty. Of relevance to the university, Rigney (2001) described the 'struggle for Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty' (p. 2) in his discussion of the positioning of Indigenous people in Western Science. He suggested:

Unless Western knowledge orthodoxies are interrogated, the basis of their power will continue to reproduce the colonised as a fixed reality, including the subtext of Indigenous intellectual nullity. The struggle for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty is to move our humanness, our scholarship, our identities and our knowledge systems (Rigney, 2001, p. 10).

The rights-based reconciliation that was mapped onto the reconciliation continuum in this project is comparable to the 'decolonial indigenization' labelled by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018, p. 218), which sought the 'the overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balancing power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians, transforming the academy into something dynamic and new' (p. 219). However, where they make a 'call to action' (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 226) to everyone within the academy to realise this vision, the participants of my study advocated for leadership at the upper levels of the University to engender and push significant transformative change.

### **2.2.7.2     *The problem and solution of CAR and Reconciliation Australia***

Chapter 1 includes references to texts that inform the background history of the key organisations that were established to articulate the formal Reconciliation process for Australia but here I acknowledge further useful analysis done by scholars such as Damien Short and Andrew Gunstone specific to rights. Short (2003a, 2003b, 2008) and Gunstone (2005, 2007), both noted that CAR and Reconciliation Australia did not—could not—properly address Indigenous rights.

Many Indigenous leaders were critical of the fact that there was a failure to acknowledge anything to do with Indigenous rights and that the resources that came from CAR ‘generally failed to adequately discuss a range of issues such as sovereignty, treaty, power relationships and self-determination’ (Gunstone, 2007, p. 155). The resulting focus on relationships excluded the acknowledgement of history, including any mention of the history of the Stolen Generations or current injustices, and the reconciliation advocated displayed ‘a limited notion of justice’ (Gunstone, 2007, p. 303). Short (2003a) referred to a 1994 CAR key issues paper as being ‘more in keeping with the blatant assimilationist policies of the pre-1960 era’ (p. 293) in its nation-building rhetoric. He also referred to other CAR papers that avoided any mention of land rights and self-determination as being ‘inherently assimilationist’ (Short, 2003a, p. 300). Despite this, Short (2003a) expressed hope that the reconciliation process would again focus on sovereignty and Indigenous rights as his research indicated this was what First Nations wanted. Indeed, this hope is being realised as First Nations rights in 2019, are now prominent on Reconciliation Australia’s website and publications.

## **2.3 Australian university narratives about reconciliation and RAPs**

### **2.3.1    The Australian university sector: now and the future**

There is a large body of literature addressing the identity of the university, including the Australian university, and what a university should be into the future. Barcan (2013) argued that there was a ‘crisis of faith that has prompted public debates on the identity and the very future, of the university as an institution’ (p. 2). Further, Barcan (2013) noted that change has always been part of the university model since its inception more than 900 years ago in Bologna to the Oxbridge model, which was transported to Australia, and added that the ‘three

big shifts—massification, marketization and internationalization—have underpinned and fuelled these changes’ (p. 5).

Australian universities have remained very similar to each other for decades. Even with repeated government calls to diversify, universities continued ‘towards increasing institutional conformity publication’ (Codling & Meek, 2006, p. 3). In a further study comparing various universities, along with France, Australia had the least diversity in comparison with other European and New Zealand institutions regarding the types of programs and overall disciplines that were offered (Huisman, Meek & Wood, 2007). This theme has been noticed repeatedly by scholars over time, who have claimed that ‘caught in a cycle of broad periodic review and interim piecemeal policy-making, the sector is crying out for a new vision for differentiation, sustainability and excellence’ (James, French & Kelly, 2017, p. 1).

Following the implementation of the *Bradley Review* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008), James et al. (2017) undertook an analysis of equity in the Australian university sector, in which they found that ‘Australia’s competitive advantages lie in Western-style, high quality education, English as the language of instruction and geographical proximity to large Asian markets for higher education’ (p. 2). They referred to how Indigenous Australians were one of the groups who remained ‘unacceptably underrepresented’ in this sector, however, they did not make any recommendations as to how this could be addressed. They described universities as being ‘all variations on a single theme: the comprehensive research university’ (James et al., 2017, p. 8), but apart from confirming the increase in the numbers of Indigenous students, like the Universities Australia (2015) policy statement, there were no other suggestions to advocate increasing the intake of Indigenous students and they also acknowledged that ‘universities are also fostering Indigenous leadership within their institutions and seeking to recognise and value Indigenous knowledges’ (James et al., 2017, pp. 19–20).

This theme was further developed by broader futurist reports, which explicitly focused more on the need to ‘attract and retain a workforce that can deal with innovation, diversity, change and multi- and cross-disciplinarity’ (Goedegebuure, Massaro, Meek & Pettigrew, 2017, p. 7). However, there was no mention of First Nations, let alone Indigenous knowledges, in either the Ernst & Young report (Halloran & Friday, 2018), the PWC (2018) report or the KPMG



report (Parker, Dempster & Warburton, 2018), which all provided recommendations regarding what needed to be addressed by the higher education sector in Australia so that students were ready for the future. The implication is that this aspect of Australian university education is of little relevance to the future of the country, let alone Australia as part of a global community. The omission is noteworthy because these reports are used by universities to inform their future planning.

### **2.3.2 Policy context for university reconciliation**

At a national level, Australia is a signatory to various international agreements, declarations and charters that may affect Australia's policy and governance operations. Specifically on a national level, this research was informed by documents held by Reconciliation Australia and its predecessor, CAR. The study was also informed by education-related reports, including the 'Bradley Review' (Bradley et al., 2008), which had as one of its key recommendations that government must work more closely with the IHEAC (later known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Committee or ATSIHEAC before it was wound up in 2015)—to improve access and outcomes for Indigenous Australians (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 159). Regarding Indigenous knowledges, it also clearly instructed higher education providers to ensure that institutional culture, cultural competence of staff and the nature of the curriculum recognised and supports the participation of Indigenous students. It also added that Indigenous knowledges 'should be embedded into the curriculum to ensure that all students have an understanding of Indigenous culture' (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 32).

Five years following the *Bradley Review* (Bradley et al., 2008), several reports were released, including the *Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* (Universities Australia & IHEAC, 2011a), the accompanying *Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* (Universities Australia & IHEAC, 2011b) and the subsequent *Behrendt Report* (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012). These documents guided and obliged universities to develop Indigenous Education Statements to demonstrate their commitment to Indigenous students and to detail their actions in response to the recommendations of these reports, which were used to inform their policies and activities related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples generally. Links from these key papers to the RAPs have been noted in the findings of this study. Funding is the incentive that pushes universities to report in this space. Since 2014,

universities must publish annual reports on their websites, which include their Indigenous Education Statements, and these include details as to how they spent Indigenous Support Programme funding.

### **2.3.3 Brickbats and bouquets for reconciling in the university**

Although First Nations matters and reconciliation received minimal attention in futurist reports, there are many scholars who have written about reconciliation in education, which is mainly focused on the school system (e.g., Ahluwalia et al., 2012; Burrridge, 2006). However, Garvey's (2008) text for higher education students of psychology offered explicit and implicit opportunities for students to contemplate the intercultural, reconciliation, space. Darlaston-Jones (quoted in Garvey, 2008) explored her beliefs regarding why Indigenous rights are significant when studying psychology and referred to the need for the university to make systemic changes to make space for First Nations to achieve those rights and be heard:

In many ways the epistemological shift that is needed in universities is analogous to the civil rights movements ... genuine reconciliation will only occur when the dominant narrative is decentred and alternative voices are given the opportunity to be heard (p. 21).

Academics who promoted their university efforts in reconciliation are Nolan, Hill and Harris (2010) who wrote of Charles Sturt University's commitment to reconciliation and social justice. Their version of reconciliation was explained as being within the 'peace keeping paradigm', with the addition of a 'concern for forgiveness, moving on, justice and truth and the creation of a social space where these interests receive validation' (Nolan et al., 2010, p. 71). Their work focused on the integration of Indigenous content into the university's curriculum because they noted that if this was done well, it would 'only add value to the process of reconciliation and social justice' (Nolan et al., 2010, p. 81). Further, they noted that it was during the 1960s, following the declaration by the United Nations that colonialism was a crime, when courses in Indigenous knowledges became available in Australian universities (Nolan et al., 2010, p. 79). Such subjects were further promoted by the formal reconciliation movement in Australia, which added impetus for the growing presence of more Indigenous voices in the public sphere, including in universities. The university had a policy commitment to have such content in all undergraduate degrees by 2015, which made them at the time, only one of two universities (the University of South Australia was the other) with such a commitment.

In contrast, Bunda (2014) researched the place of Indigenous peoples within Australian universities and was scathing in her analysis of the enactment of reconciliation. She contended that universities may have developed reconciliation statements, but they ignored any concepts related to sovereignty. Bunda (2014) was critical of the compromised ‘national embrace of a Reconciliation movement in lieu of sovereign-to-sovereign treaty discussions and financial recompense for past wrongs and possible future developments’ (p. 181). She challenges that universities, where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are working and studying, are the places for such discussions: ‘dialogue about Indigenous sovereignty’ needed to happen because it ‘is crucial to healthy Indigenous presence in the university’ (Bunda, 2014, pp. 188–189).

### **2.3.4 Significant documents that could/should shape reconciliation in universities**

#### **2.3.4.1 *The UNDRIP***

Indigenous rights can be linked at a global level to the attempts by organisations to respond to the UNDRIP, which was created over two decades by Indigenous peoples (United Nations, 2008) and passed by the United Nations in 2007. Across the world, Indigenous groups continue to put the UNDRIP forward as ‘the foundational document for the development of all policies concerning Indigenous peoples, including issues related to access to justice’ (Duffy, 2013, p. 4). The UNDRIP outlines the identity, cultural, education, health, language and many other rights, both individual and collective, of the world’s First Peoples, and although it is non-binding, it is held in high moral esteem (Duffy, 2013). For example, in both Australia and Canada, people have used the UNDRIP to advocate for rights as part of reconciliation. Evidence of this includes an international submission made on behalf of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the Sixth Session in Geneva in July 2013 (Duffy, 2013) and by the TRC in Canada. That the TRC made the recommendation to the Canadian government ‘to adopt and implement the UNDRIP as the framework for reconciliation’ (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b, p. 5) also indicates it is pertinent to this subject area. Australian scholars, such as Anderson and Ma Rhea (2018), Gunstone (2008), Ma Rhea (2014, 2015a, 2015b) and Nakata (2013) all argued for the crucial need of a rights-based framework to ensure long-term changes in education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Further, Moreton-

Robinson (2015) argued that Australia, in finally supporting the UNDRIP in 2009 along with Canada, the USA and New Zealand, ‘made a discursive shift from indignation to reconciliation’ (p. 185).

#### **2.3.4.2 Key directive documents of 2011 – 2012**

This research has been informed by four interrelated key reports—guidelines created for Australian universities published during 2011 and 2012. *The National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* (Universities Australia & IHEAC, 2011a), which was closely followed by *The Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Behrendt Review)* (Behrendt et al., 2012) and had been preceded by the broader *Review of Higher Education (Bradley Review)* (Bradley et al., 2008). In response to two of the key recommendations of the Behrendt Review that universities should use a whole-of-university approach, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSIEAC, 2015) produced a paper in which a reference to connecting business practices and processes to plans and strategies, including RAPs, was suggested as ‘core good practice’ (p. 4).

Universities Australia and IHEAC’s guiding principles texts (Universities Australia & IHEAC, 2011a, 2011b) distilled the essence of the research and thinking completed in this area and, along with the report *On Stony Ground: Governance and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in Australian universities*, compiled by Moreton-Robinson, Walter, Singh and Kimber (2011), provided guidance for Australian universities on how they should frame their work in Indigenous education. There is a respectful acknowledgement in the executive summary that they provide guidelines only and that for some universities, the ideas presented will not be new. Given that there are only a few universities with RAPs, these Guiding Principles could be the only instructive documents for guiding reconciliation-related activities in Australian universities. There are five key principles, which have been organised to reflect the five areas most affected by Indigenous activity in the sector: university governance, teaching and learning, Indigenous research, human resources and community engagement. By using these five headlines, one finds the core of an action framework. For each key principle, there are several recommendations, which form the basis for the actions.

The report is incisive and each recommendation is written so that there is little ambiguity regarding what is expected. However, the extent of the action is for the reader to determine.

For example, if one enacted ‘Recommendation 1: Embed the Guiding Principles of the National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities’ (p. 5), all others would be subsumed into it. When addressing Recommendation 6, under governance and management, which states to ‘include Indigenous student and staff outcomes in the key performance indicators of university organisational units and senior staff’, one can immediately note the importance of the matrix structure on organisational functions. The vertical line of authority denotes the governance structures, which along with the core teaching and learning functions of a university, must be addressed simultaneously if change is to occur. These principles, though published in 2011, are still relevant in how they outline Reconciliation in action for the higher education sector. A further link to the proposed research is in the apparent link to RAPs in Recommendation 7 under governance and management (Universities Australia & IHEAC, 2011b), in which the principles appeared to give a mandate for RAPs in stating that universities should ‘create strategies and plans to address and enable the university’s Indigenous Education Strategy and mission statements and corporate documents, which are inclusive of Indigenous Australian peoples and cultures’ (p. 5).

Also noteworthy are the writings of international scholars, such as Zembylas (2011), who argued that educative environments are places for challenge and dialogue regarding Reconciliation experiences. Whereas Zembylas (2011) wrote about schools being ‘already political terrains in which emotions are ideologically appropriated’ and which ‘can be further radicalized, if they are turned into places of humane connections with adversaries’ (p. 29), this project examines reconciliation in universities. Also noted was a children’s book with a primary school audience in mind, in which a RAP was referred to as one of the ways that reconciliation can be expressed in schools (Chaney & Marika, 2009, p. 26).

The report reviewing university governance associated with Indigenous education, ‘On Stony Ground: Governance and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation in Australian Universities’ (Moreton-Robinson, Walter, Singh & Kimber, 2011) was also critical of many Indigenous Education Statements, claiming that ‘in many cases the Indigenous Education Statement conveys either the fact or the impression that the RAP has been drawn up by the Indigenous Education Unit and is, also, their responsibility’ (p. 51). Three of the four University RAPs assessed for this project were written and led by staff from such units,

however, the responsibility for targets appeared to be spread across university portfolios, not just with the Indigenous centres.

## **2.4 Summary and conclusion**

The literature review has demonstrated that the idea of reconciliation within the public political sphere is complicated and contested. The ideas about Reconciliation relevant to this project, have played out across the globe largely from the second half of the twentieth century. It was only during the 1980s that the formal, political process of Reconciliation became part of the Australian reconciliation experience, and this included the development of RAPs by Reconciliation Australia. The RAPs were an attempt to integrate the idea of reconciliation as a measurable aspect of how organisations engaged in their business. Since then, several scholars have analysed and critiqued Australian reconciliation (e.g., Burrridge, 2006, 2009; Dodson, P., 2007, Gunstone, 2005, 2007, 2008; Huggins, 2008; Maddison, 2017; Matthews & Aberdeen, 2008; Nolan, Hill & Harris, 2010, Short, 2003, 2004, 2008). Since 2006 when RAPs were first introduced, the number of organisations, including schools, which have developed, revised and updated their RAPs has increased significantly (Reconciliation Australia, 2017d). However, from the time when this project commenced in 2013 to its conclusion in 2019, the number of those with RAPs had only increased slightly so that by April 2019 approximately one quarter of Australian universities had RAPs. For universities that choose to use a RAP, there is situated literature that provides some guidance of how to place them within the university's governance structure

Whatever the reasons, it is evident from the literature that, at a national level, there remains 'in the context of Australia's historical and contemporary (persistent) lack of cognizance of the meaning and processes of reconciliation' (Bullen, 2019, p. 179). The following chapter announces the methodology used to explore and help further explain this fascinatingly complex idea.

### **3. Methodology**

The point that I make is that, again, connecting in at that community interface, being able to work on the ground with people. I say to people when they go onto doing research, I say, look you can throw out all your research books and advisory texts and Gregory's road maps on how to work in Aboriginal communities. The reality is, you've got to be completely flexible and you've also got to have lots of time and lots of patience. But that also comes from the other way because it's all about building up trust and respect and connection (Interviewee #22).

#### **3.1 Introducing the methodology**

Labelling oneself ontologically is problematic when investigating the indistinct dynamic process that is reconciliation within universities—a process which one is simultaneously experiencing and enacting while researching it, depending on where one is standing when approaching the data. I am an inductive interpretivist ethnographer (e.g., Denzin, 1997; van Hulst, 2008) in terms of the research paradigm and approach as this research project is about me attempting to understand what is happening within the university reconciliation space, based on my lived working experience. Denzin's (2000) declaration that the research paradigm is meant to be 'simultaneously minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative and critical' (p. 401) resonates for how I positioned myself within the research, especially when I eventually added self-study as a methodology within the policy ethnography.

The basis for data collection and analyses were the RAPs and the people, including me, who were connected to those RAPs. These people were the authority on revealing aspects of reconciliation and the RAPs because they have evolved over time. Ontologically, I know there is more that should be done within universities to actualise a more reconciled Australia, whatever that dynamic state may be. This belief was sharpened by my experience of working with one university RAP and I wanted to hear what others had to say about reconciliation now and into the future. From my experience, the RAP was part of the execution of what I understood to be reconciliation in a university and thus, I chose a policy ethnography as the methodological road and 'travelled' this road using three methods to gather data: the RAP documents, interviews and a self-study.

### **3.1.1 Research design and methodological approach**

The research design that structured this policy ethnography could be outlined by these protocols. These policy ethnography protocols guided data collection and analyses:

Protocol 1: Read original RAP for that university (all were current when project started).

Protocol 2: Contact at least one person named in association with that RAP to request an interview.

Protocol 3: Interview people and ask them about significant others to approach for an interview.

Protocol 4: Observe and make notes during and immediately following interviews (memo).

Protocol 5: Consider other documents participants suggest are connected to their RAP.

Protocol 6: Complete RRS (see Chapter 4).

Protocol 6: Listen to interview recordings and organise interview transcripts.

Protocol 7: Send interviewees a copy of their interview transcript for checking.

Protocol 8: Complete a Level 1 analysis of the interview data.

Protocol 9: Engage in analysis stage of RRS (see Chapter 4).

Protocol 10: Loop back to the RAPs and complement Levels 2 and 3 analyses of interview data along with that of the RAPs and include RRS data.

### **3.1.2 Researcher positioning**

In exploring the concept of positioning myself, I acknowledge Selby's (2004) work regarding Indigenous and non-Indigenous people communicating and working together. Selby (2004) argued that there will always be 'some mismatch' (p. 145). Whatever the outcome from the interactions, which for me were the interviews I conducted with First Nations, she would argue that 'these accounts may be judged "good enough" as vehicles to understand and to engage with others rather than a literal and unambiguous and coherent truth about ourselves' (Selby, 2004, p. 145). As a 'Wadjella' of Italian heritage, who has been educated in the



Western scholarly tradition, I am aware of my privileged position within the Western academy of the Australian university. I am part of the messiness of Australian colonial history and recognise that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples working together ‘is always occurring within a context of contested divides, multiple intentions and fragments of emotional needs mirrored by contradictory elements in our cultures so distorted by history’ (Selby, 2004, p. 146).

Selby also noted in deconstructing Bhabha’s (1988) ideas about ‘hybridisation’ within the third space, that what is happening is that we are ‘creating something new, an integration, while losing something at the same time’ (Bhabha, 1994, as cited in Selby, 2017, p. 148). Additionally, in her reference to non-Indigenous Australians and guilt in the context of reconciliation, Selby (2004, p. 154) offers insight that this ‘guilt’ is a useful feeling in helping a non-Indigenous researcher explore further the relationships between them and First Nations. This was helpful in shaping the project as it had begun with my awareness of the challenges universities faced unpacking reconciliation.

In qualifying that I explored the idea of reconciliation in that ‘space in-between’, I am writing about a subject of relevance to all communities in the country in which I live, although it delineates between the First Peoples and all others. This standpoint is informed by what Jones and Jenkins (2008) called ‘locating ourselves in the “between” to develop a stronger sense of how our selves are and have been formed in the troubled engagement with First Nations and their lands and spaces’ (p. 482). However, in an extension of their explanation, the reconciliation space within the cultural interface space requires relationships with the ‘Other’ and dismantling this to form partnerships. In this context, a partner in a higher education space means having deep respect and heed of First Nations people *and* the knowledge systems of those nations. Working with each other in ways that privilege the First Nations of that place, is more attuned to the framework outlined by Wright (2011), who also warned researchers, citing Nakata (1998) and Rigney (2001), that Western knowledges-based research ‘has in effect both been used to oppress Indigenous people and de-legitimise Indigenous ontology and epistemology’ (p. 26).

### **3.1.3 Using bracketing**

I was conscious also to use bracketing (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010) when commencing the interview process. However, for people with whom I already had a working relationship, it

was disingenuous to pretend that I did not know anything about the subject. Standpoints are explained further in Chapter 4, but for now I note that standpoints *do* matter. In respect to the protocols of First Nations, I introduced myself within the context of this research (e.g., Ardill, 2013, p. 323) and invited interviewees to do the same. My aim in using bracketing, was to ‘not influence the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon’ but to invite a space so that ‘each participant can present the researcher with new knowledge and new understanding in the search for the essence of things through the identification of essential themes’ (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010, p. 17). While I asked further probing questions when relevant, even when information appeared to contradict evidence I already had, I did not correct or augment information shared. In describing how to achieve bracketing, Beech (1999) explored the philosophical basis for bracketing, which was based on the origins of phenomenological research dating back to Husserl (Beech, 1999, p. 36). Given that I was conscious to remain self-aware and reflective during the research process, some form of respectful bracketing can be said to have occurred (Beech, 1999).

During the new self-study method (see Chapter 4), bracketing was more complex and I was acutely aware that although that interview was about *my* opinions and feelings, I was sharing them within the confines and liberties of the relationship I had with the interviewer, Jeannie Morrison. As RRS is a form of reflexive practice, I had given her permission to challenge and question me by reflecting my questions back to me in ways she wanted to present them. This was a difficult, sometimes insightful, sometimes tricky and at other times graceful process. ‘Dadirri’ and ‘Boodja Neh’ extend the concept of bracketing and localise it as an aspect of RRS.

#### **3.1.4 Maintaining trustworthiness**

As the data included contributions from First Nations people, as a non-Indigenous researcher I was careful to establish the ‘trustworthiness’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1985 as cited in Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006, p. 98) of the data, which was also in keeping with the key principles in the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS, 2012).

I aimed to establish a sense of trustworthiness through the following strategies. First, I checked the transcripts and re-listened to interviews and then reminded the interviewees to check and edit their transcripts. I was careful to address supervisor and panel feedback throughout the candidacy, which included a co-supervisor who was a senior First Nations

academic. Just like R. Holt (2016), who sought approval for her work in her 'Circle of Elders for language and guidance and ancestral knowledge' (p. 43), I sought approval for my ways of working from a reference group consisting of wise peers, who were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues and friends with expertise working in Australian intercultural spaces that involved Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. I checked with them about matters such as gaining support from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC) to undertake this project and permission to use Noongar language in this thesis. Finally, I received consent from the First Nations interviewees to provide copies of the interview audio recordings to the AIATSIS library to make them available to others, which further confirmed my efforts to be truthful with the data. These actions were also me, as the researcher, trying to enact 'reconciliation' as I completed the project.

### **3.2 Leading with a policy ethnography**

As stated, the RAPs were the policy documents that led the policy ethnography in this study. A policy ethnography is a research methodology that includes an awareness that 'subordinate officers in administrations can play a key role in defining a policy' (Dubois, 2009, p. 222), which is why I interviewed people involved in administering RAPs in universities and Reconciliation Australia. Additionally, it is on such a premise, along with the understanding that policy mainly 'exists through the experience of its recipients' (Dubois, 2009, p. 222), that RAPs are noted as having an impact at multiple levels of organisations, which led to the choice of a policy ethnographic research methodology as the best option for this project. Dubois (2009) also contended, in regard to the former premise, that people on the ground may not be those who make the key decisions around budget for example or strategic direction, however, they make daily decisions and 'use their discretion in the orientation of their practices and the definition of their attitude' (p. 222). The key recipients of RAP policies were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for whom 'policies are more significant as places, agents and concrete situations that have tangible effects on their social life than as laws and budgets' (Dubois, 2009, p. 222). These two premises led to me to conduct the interviews and survey the websites, as well as other policies and plans.

There were aspects of 'postcritical policy ethnography' in this project because the methods used and ensuing analyses sought to include 'the messiness of policy as a set of everyday

materially and historically weighted practices and foregrounds the productive effects and failures through attention to these complexities' (Childers, 2011, p. 353). The data obtained from the policy ethnography were explored using strategies from grounded theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) because the initial aim had been to emanate theory from the ground up—from the raw data gathered via the policy ethnography process. Therefore, the starting points were the RAP documents, which were followed by interview data, the self-study and related documents and other artefacts. Memos were also considered to help place all the information and interviewees in a historical context at that point and were referred to alongside interview transcriptions.

Policy ethnography cannot be solely about the people associated with those policies, but is 'more specifically in the ethnography of policy settings, agents, practices, organizations and processes' (Dubois, 2015, p. 29), I was conscious of my interpretivist responsibilities to be generous with those who had created, used and pushed RAPs as policies to create their understanding of a reconciliation, while critiquing the associated practices. I have been careful to not yoke the words in the RAPs with inordinate power because it is the artefacts of the RAPs and their positioning that is more significant. However, my goodwill was counterbalanced by the need to question and challenge because this ethnographic study had been conducted within the university sector, in which it is incumbent on all to lead thinking, shaping and enacting, just as stated in universities' mission and vision statements and laid bare in their strategic plans.

### **3.2.1 Grounded theory as directional informant for policy ethnography**

The intention was to explore the phenomenon of reconciliation within university environments as a way of being and also how people and organisations created ways of 'knowing' and knowledge about reconciliation via policy. This intention is echoed within the grounded theory methodological approach 'of engaging both *why* questions and *what* and *how* questions' (Charmaz, 2008, p. 397). The decision to use grounded theory strategies to inform the policy ethnography, was made because the majority of the people I interviewed had such long-lived experiences in the subject that I believed their collective wisdom could lead to theorisation about the current situation and the future.

The key research strategies presented in Charmaz's (2014) version of grounded theory allowed for flexibility and for both inductive and abductive processes, which guided the

analysis of the data during the policy ethnography. The continual writing of memos, common in such a study, also supplemented the data gathering process. The writing process commenced with a basic description of the findings, which was followed by a search for overall themes within the descriptions and then summary judgements of what was implied by those key themes. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the policy ethnography at three levels:

Level 1—a basic description of the people, plans and self, with summarised responses to the interview questions.

Level 2—a collection of the prominent themes and subthemes as evidenced within the findings.

Level 3—a synthesis of the themes from Level 2 that captured key responses to the research question.

### **3.2.1.1     *Memoing—a precursor to self-study***

I used memoing from the onset of the project because grounded theory had informed my initial research design. For me, this was both a research diary and a means to record my reflections and emergent questions and ideas for further exploration, especially after I conducted interviews. The memoing process helped me to explore and articulate preconceptions and how I felt about what I was learning. I was aware that I would eventually have to listen to the interview recordings, read transcripts and assess the RAP documents, to glean meanings and theorise, so memoing as I gathered data helped me to be self-critical and self-aware of my part in the research process, which eventually led me to add the self-study.

### **3.2.1.2     *Conducting the literature review***

The implementation and utilisation of the literature review in research that uses any aspects of grounded theory has always been uncomfortable (Dunne, 2011, p. 111). The pragmatic conclusion by Henwood and Pidgeon (as cited in Charmaz, 2014) was to take the position of being a ‘theoretical agnostic’ (p. 306). However, I have worked and engaged in scholarship in areas related to this project for several years and was clearly influenced by the work of others. However, I was careful to conduct the literature review in two distinct ways for this project. First, I completed a review of the historical literature, with a focus on texts about the broader subject of reconciliation and education, before I shaped the research study. After completing a first draft, which outlined a description of the findings, I returned to the

literature to search for theories to help me analyse the findings. This second broad sweep of the literature helped me to assess whether existing theories explained the key findings or if there was a gap and a need for theory construction that emanated from my data. I also sought to uncover and acknowledge more recent research on reconciliation in Australia generally and specifically about reconciliation in Australian universities.

### **3.2.2 Document analysis**

The RAPs were initially downloaded from the Reconciliation Australia website and individual university websites and a desktop search was completed regarding associated information and documents. The interviewees were also asked if they had any relevant documents to share.

Bowen's (2009, p. 32) method of document analysis was used to assess key aspects of the four RAPs, which involved a scan of the documents, followed by a reading and some basic interpretation of the contents using predefined codes from the three pillars of the RAP framework: relationships, respect and opportunities.

The existence of the RAPs and the interviewees' understandings and interpretations were of paramount importance to this project, rather than the intricacies of the words contained within the RAP documents. As a result, the document analysis undertaken as part of the policy ethnography was limited in its scope and detail. The RAPs were dense with words but they also contained graphics, which were tributes to the peoples, land and sometimes the artists of the country of their main campuses (see Appendix B). Additionally, each of the RAPs reproduced further words in the many reports that were written for Reconciliation Australia (a requirement of having a RAP) and within reports as part of university reporting systems. Elements of CRT informed this study, which led to the use of critical discourse analysis with its 'emphasis on the discursive construction of power relations and its commitment to progressive social change' (Taylor, 2004, p. 445) to analyse the RAPs and other documents.

The key purpose for the RAP documents in this research were that they provided a context for the research project. However, unlike Bowen (2009), it was not specifically the words within the documents, but rather their existence, positioning and use of the document by the people within the university systems which were of primary significance. Hence the analysis

of the words was only done as part of the thematic assessment that was revealed from the interview and self-study data.

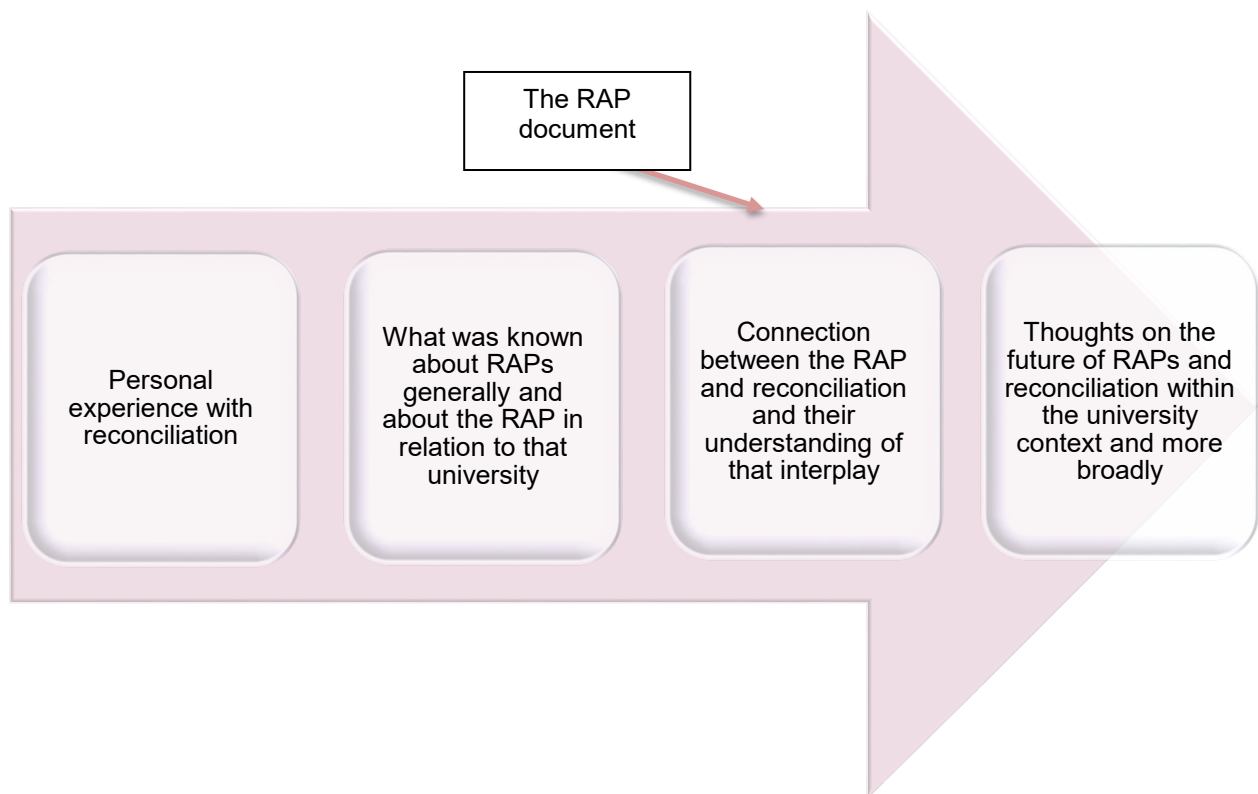
### **3.2.3 Role of the interviews and the questions**

The project methodology enabled the interrogation of the central research question through the exploration of the following thematic sets of sub-questions. (see Appendices A and E). The first few questions were introductory questions to establish the interviewees' connection to their university's RAP and their engagement with the reconciliation process, and thus, their significance to the project. The next set of questions established the philosophical foundations for their ideas regarding Reconciliation and their understanding in the development of RAPs, whereas the subsequent group of questions interrogated their experience of RAPs and reconciliation at a university and the Australian higher education policy context more broadly. The final group of questions uncovered their ideas about the RAP's connection to reconciliation going into the future (see Figure 3.1).

I then conducted data analysis to probe and glean recommendations from my findings to propose how authentic and relevant future reconciliation in university contexts could occur. Interviewees were asked to cover the same subjects as per the questions, although the order in which the questions were answered and the context for some of the responses were mixed. Only the first question was asked in the order stated in Appendix A.

The questions I used changed slightly once I started the level 1 data analysis. I amended a few of the questions and decided to delete others. The decision to slightly change and add to the interview questions was based on what I heard from participants early in the research process. For example, I had initially included a question about the university's publicised value, but because it added little substance to the conversation, I deleted it. Conversely, I didn't have an explicit question about rights. However, when this was raised by my first participant I explored it further when the concept was raised by others. Similarly, the question regarding who had responsibility for the RAP also evolved because people raised the topic of leadership, so I added a sub-question that explored RAP drivers.

Although I may appear to have asked too many questions, the questions were there as prompts to guide the conversation in case people did not cover the four broad areas I wanted to explore. These four areas are presented in Figure 3.1:



**Figure 3.1: Interview question themes**

The key intention of the questions was to elicit responses from the participants on what they regarded as key concerns, learnings and understandings, as well as to provide them with the opportunity to share what they knew about RAPs and reconciliation within universities. I wanted them to speak to their experiences and to share what they believed reconciliation should be, primarily within the context of universities and connected to university RAPs. In gathering data from 29 people on this specific topic, I hoped there would be some emergent theories regarding what should be done. It has been vital to my learning and working in this intercultural context within a university, that one needs to listen and find ways to translate what was learned from listening to the rest of the university.

### ***3.2.3.1 Validation of questions***

There were three key methods by which I validated the interview questions. First, NATSIHEC gave their support for the research project via their deputy chairperson and I used email evidence of this support as part of my university ethics application. I then consulted with my reference group and used their feedback to reorder the questions.



Another event that may be considered more of a commendation than a validation of the questions, occurred after I completed the interviews at ANU when I received a request that my interview questions be used for the ANU Annual Reconciliation Lecture. I was approached by staff from the National Centre for Indigenous Studies, who asked that I slightly edit my questions so they could be used to inform the proposed lecture to be given that year by the invited speaker, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. This was supported by the RAP committee at the university. Although the university later decided that Rudd could shape his presentation without my questions, I viewed this interchange as further affirmation of my research tool.

### **3.2.3.2     *The role of the interviewer***

My positioning as a researcher–interviewer is explored more fully in Chapter 4 but for this part of the policy ethnography, I note that during the interview process, the interactions naturally produced a relationship between me as the researcher–interviewer and the interviewees. The consequences of this relationship need to be considered, especially given the topic and because the interviews were between me as a non-Indigenous researcher interviewing First Nations people. I recognised that the act of ‘doing’ the interviews could be reconciliation in action. Certainly, I hoped that my research could be viewed as research that ‘mitigate[d] against the damaging effects of colonisation’ (Wright, 2011, p. 23).

The key purpose of conducting interviews with each person was to explore what they wanted to focus on within the realms of the research study. I purposely asked compound questions at times because I wanted to see what that person would focus on and whether they would dismiss part thereof or address the entire question. I also wanted to leave interviewees free to evade aspects if they wanted to. I wanted to discover what I really needed to unpack further from the RAPs and even more importantly, about the concept of Reconciliation within this specific context.

Finally, I attempted to action the ‘culturally safe research practices’ that Wright (2011) outlined, being aware that this research was based on Eurocentric principles and that I especially needed ‘to be prepared to work with humility and to accept the role of student and learner’ (p. 40).

### 3.2.3.3 *Description of the interview*

People were invited to participate in interviews with the researcher via purposive sampling. They were given the Explanatory Statement (see Appendix C) and when they accepted the invitation for an interview, further information was provided. Prior to the interview, participants were given an updated version of the Explanatory Statement and asked to sign the consent form (see Appendix D). I interviewed 29 people in 24 separate interviews during 2015–2016. Twenty-one of those interviews were conducted face-to-face and three were phone interviews. Most of the face-to-face interviews were conducted on university campuses and in the offices of participants. Two interviews were conducted in cafes close to universities. I chose the face-to-face interview method as my first preference because it allowed me to speak as little as possible and give nonverbal cues to encourage speakers to keep speaking. The way I expressed agreement I recognise may have influenced them to continue or cease talking.

Most of the interviews were with individuals, but in three instances I interviewed two or more people simultaneously. In one of the latter cases, I had suggested that the interview take place with two people because I knew that both of these people had worked together to initiate one of the university RAPs. In the other two instances, the suggestion was made to me by the participants whom I had initially approached. The interviews were semi-structured and I endeavoured to cover the same set of questions in each one. Where I judged that an interviewee had not sufficiently addressed a question, I returned for a follow-up interview, which occurred in three instances. However, all participants were given the opportunity to review and edit their transcripts and talk further with me.

Although there was no request to declare gender or age, there appeared to be mix of participants, whose ages were between mid-30s to early-70s. There was also a combination of academics, people in administrative or non-academic positions and people not working in universities, which included staff from Reconciliation Australia. Fourteen people identified as First Nations Australians and sixteen were non-Indigenous Australians. It was challenging to conduct these interviews because I had not met most of the interviewees before their interviews. However, the methodology allowed me to conduct follow-up interviews and communicate further with interviewees, which helped ensure that I gathered rich data.

My preference was to conduct the interviews face-to-face because part of the research involved being in the space of each university that I was researching. The artefacts I observed and the physical environments of the universities were part of the findings of my report. I made memos after each visit to describe the places that I had walked or sat in, especially the places where the participants worked. The process of actually visiting the campuses was integral to how I assessed and listened to the stories regarding reconciliation in those universities. I acknowledge that because I work on one of the campuses of the four universities that I studied, my analysis and experience of those spaces is significantly stronger than my experiences of visiting the other three universities. However, I visited each university and made an effort to be especially aware of the physical spaces that were the Indigenous Centres and areas for each university.

Because I chose to do a policy ethnography, the documents directed where I went and whom I interviewed. For my first interview, I chose a person with whom I had worked for several years but who now worked at another university. This participant had expressed great positivity and keenness to be part of the project and when one of my supervisors suggested I start with her, I realised it was a safe way to commence the data gathering process. This interview had been preceded by several meetings with my reference group to check the questions and to be particularly mindful of how I, as a non-Indigenous person, shaped the questions for First Nations people whom I had never met before. This was something highlighted to me by the First Nations people in my reference group.

I reviewed the transcripts and listened to the recordings numerous times to listen deeply to not only the words but also how the words were spoken. As I listened deeply, I was able to cross reference with the memos composed following each interview. I adjusted the questions slightly after the first few interviews once I could see some emergent categories, such as racism, which appeared significant to the interviewees and required further examination.

### **3.2.4 Using self-study**

The policy ethnography did not initially include a self-study, but in addressing my epistemological understandings of positionality as a researcher who claimed the act of this project involved ‘doing reconciliation,’ it became evident that memo writing would not be adequate to evidence reconciliation, let alone prompt reflexivity. The mid-candidature panel suggestion that I add something to the project that explored positioning led me to consider

self-study methodology at that point. A simple reflexive premise of self-study, that ‘careful observations of experience allow us to develop, uncover, and understand practice’ (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 30) also made this methodology relevant.

The result was data that was even richer because it now contained the ‘thick description of the embodied and embedded researcher of and in, higher education’ (Scutt & Hobson, 2013, p. 26). Now that aspects of the methodology were focused on ‘look[ing] at self in action, usually within educational contexts’ (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008, p. 17), I was forced to question my earlier assertion that I was ‘doing reconciliation’ in my conduct of the research. Chapter 4 describes the self-study version I used because it contributed to shaping the policy ethnography for this research. The key element of this self-study was that it involved a First Nations person working with me to shape and complete it.

The suggested self-study guidelines outlined by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) and Feldman (2003) also informed the process, along with the evidence (see Chapters 4 and 5) and the insights gained (see Chapters 6 and 7) into my practice as an educator. For example, I aimed to address Guideline 13, which states that ‘interpretations made of self-study data should not only reveal but also interrogate the relationships, contradictions and limits of the views presented’ (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). To begin with, this current chapter allows for the detailed description of how I collected the data (Feldman, 2003, p. 27). However and most significantly, the way I shaped and conducted the self-study led to the evolution of a new version of self-study methodology, which is detailed in Chapter 4.

#### ***3.2.4.1 Introducing my variation on the self-study method***

Given my role as a staff educator working with First Nation colleagues, previous work on the local RAP and the fact that I had chosen to engage in policy ethnography, it seemed that the use of self-study methodology was appropriate. It appeared to be a complementary method to enable purposeful reflection because it offered me the ‘study of one’s self, one’s actions, one’s ideas, as well as the “not self”. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural and political ... it draws on one’s life, but it is more than that’ (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 236, as cited in Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009, p. 20). This method permitted me to add further shape to the policy ethnography within my understanding of ‘doing reconciliation’ as I could honestly and explicitly voice my own experiences alongside the voices of those I was interviewing.

To describe and deconstruct one's position using the terminology of educational research can be difficult, but it is a radical and vulnerable move to actually reposition oneself onto the other side of the research process. The addition of the reconciliation lens led me to approach my workplace colleague, a First Nations (Reconciliation) Elder, Jeannie Morrison, whom I had known for many years and with whom I had worked during the university's first RAP, to ask her to interview me. Jeannie was enthusiastic and I eventually scheduled the interview. I had already interviewed Jeannie several months prior for the project. Chapters 4 and 5 reveal aspects of the interview process and the findings, whereas Chapter 7 further highlights the method and its principles.

For now, I acknowledge that the process had some similarities with an anti-colonial theory proposed by Puch-Bouwman (2014), but unlike hers, my method does not propose or attempt redress or compensation. Puch-Bouwman (2014) critiqued some of the theory practice positions that non-Indigenous researchers used with Indigenous peoples and proposed 'rectificatory justice' (Collste, 2010). Puch-Bouwman uses Collste's (2010) description of this justice as having 'transgenerational responsibility' (p. 92) to shape her as part of her theory that has a 'rectificatory position' (Puch-Bouwman, 2014, p. 410). The method Jeannie and I used made no effort to amend or redress and instead offered a unique reciprocal research opportunity for select researchers (see Chapters 4 and 7).

### **3.3 Deep listening plus 'Boodjah Neh'**

An important aspect of this policy ethnography was that it was premised on the understanding that Indigenous knowledges, based in the epistemologies of the First Nations of Australia, must be acknowledged and explored alongside those of the Western traditions. I was aware that there are several ways of 'Katajininy warniny' (Noongar words for 'ways of knowing, being and doing in the world') and several knowledge systems, and that our ways of knowing are often hybrids of more than one of these systems. I also agree with Homi K Bhaba that we exist within forms of cultural hybridity, in which 'different cultures and knowledge systems operate in the same space' (Breidlid, 2013, p. 47), which led me to reflect on how to best articulate the process because stating that I was doing policy ethnography was inadequate.

When engaging with participants and approaching the data, which included the physical spaces where I met people and any associated artefacts, I recognised that I was consciously employing my interpretation of 'deep listening'. The version of deep listening I initially used

was the one attributed to Ungunmerr-Baumann (1993), although it was another Indigenous scholar, Judy Atkinson (2002), who first used and wrote about it as a research method. Further, as I gathered and then began to inductively analyse the data, the situatedness of the phenomena I was exploring (i.e. Australian university RAP related reconciliation) came to the fore. After spending more time On-Country with participants who were from the country I lived and worked (Noongar Country in the south-west of Western Australia), I found local First Nation words that more accurately reflected what I was doing. Hence the inclusion of concept of ‘Boodja neh’ (Johnston & Forrest, in review) in this thesis.

The concept of deep listening has been referenced within studies of music, theology and spiritual writings, feminist studies and by various First Peoples around the globe. It is difficult to ascertain where it first appeared because it was simply something that was named after it had been practised for probably thousands of years. I realised that, as a member of the settler majority population, I needed to acknowledge that ‘deafness of the colonisers to Indigenous speakers is one of the necessary conditions of a colonised society’ (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 478). Therefore, it was essential that I consciously employed a method to counteract this deafness as part of my reconciliatory research paradigm.

Deep listening fits with conducting good interviews and especially as shaped by the RRS version of self-study. ‘Boodjah Neh’ (Johnston & Forrest, in review) added an extra dimension so I could accommodate ‘Country’ as something that must be attended to, and which formed the context for the data. My understanding of this form of deep listening also meant that I listened and did not rush to analyse or attempt to make meaning. I listened to what was said and what was not said and how it was said. I tried to empathise but I did not superimpose my frameworks for meaning (I used ‘bracketing’ – see 3.1.3) over what the other person was saying. The key principles of deep listening methodology as referred to by Atkinson (2002) and reiterated by Laycock, Walker, Harrison and Brands (2011, p. 53) were to gain trust, respect and relationships as I listened, and to enhance cultural safety (Wright, 2011). Deep listening provided me with a way to express the reconciliation I was ‘doing’ as I explored it as an idea.

### **3.4 The writing process**

#### **3.4.1 Privileging First Peoples**

The principle of ‘privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands’ (Martin and Mirraoopa, 2003, p. 205) was a key tenet in writing up this thesis. Martin and Mirraoopa (2003) built this principle upon work done by Rigney (1993) and West (2000), who both articulated forms of Indigenist research principles. In addition to citing First Nations scholars wherever relevant, I have also used the words of my First Nations participants to begin six of the seven chapters of this thesis. When providing evidence for findings, I have included all voices but have where possible, cited First Nations before others.

#### **3.4.2 Reflecting on theorising**

In listening to people whom I knew had long-lived experiences of this complex dynamic concept of reconciliation, I expected new insights and maybe even the possibility of new theories. Therefore, the precepts of grounded theory were helpful because as an ‘emergent method’, it was particularly well suited for ‘studying uncharted, contingent, or dynamic phenomena’ (Charmaz, 2008, p. 155). How people feel and think about reconciliation changes over time and I hoped that theory might arise from the data, which could hold on to the dynamic nature of reconciliation in Australian universities. It also allowed for things to be revealed that were unexpected when starting the research process and while conducting the research. As Charmaz (2008) noted, ‘the past shapes the present and future but does not make either wholly predictable’ (p. 157).

As a ‘close-up’ researcher (Trowler, 2012), I have aimed to avoid ambiguity in the relationship between the data and the theory, to note what is notable and ‘render the normal strange’ (Delamont, 2002, as cited in Trowler, 2012, p. 276). The decision to conduct a self-study was in response to the call to be reflexive in developing any theory to ‘provide a discourse to describe the world and to explain it’ (Trowler, 2012, p. 282).

#### **3.4.3 Indigenous languages**

Language was not a big limitation in this project, but I noted that the First Nations people, along with other interviewees including me, knew and had lived, other languages. Hence my

choice in this document to use some of the local Wadjuk Noongar words to more honourably reflect what was intended. This was another small effort to ‘do reconciliation’ as part of the research process.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Approval to conduct research was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Monash University. Prospective interview participants were initially provided with an information sheet together with a consent form (see Appendix D). Participants’ identities were initially confidential and securely coded. However, if interviewees wished to be identified, this was managed with advice from my supervisors. Digital recordings and transcripts were held in a safe and copies were sent to AIATSIS as per the consent forms—except for one participant, the other 29 participants agreed to send copies of the recordings to the AIATSIS library. Although I had initially claimed that any publication arising out of the research, including this thesis, would present data without identifying participants, all participants subsequently agreed, which was evidenced on their consent forms, to be identifiable. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the interview process at any time without needing to provide a reason.

Subsequent to the previous section, because this research project was about Australian reconciliation, I explored the nexus or space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people meet. Therefore, I interviewed Australian First Nations people and also other First Nations people. It is also noted that the thrust of this research was to explore a space where there are likely to be more non-Indigenous Australian people than Indigenous people, and people who have been actively involved in the Reconciliation process at a national level or university staff directly connected to the local RAP document. This research was conducted within the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS, 2012). All research involving Indigenous peoples must adhere to the AIATSIS guidelines and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (NHMRC, 2003), I am confident that this study did not place any participants at risk, was not exploitative or appropriated knowledge, which would be contrary to the core values of the guidelines, which are: reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity (NHMRC, 2003, p. 8).



After obtaining ethics approval and commencing the research, I consulted with my PhD supervisors and my reference group, which included local Australian Indigenous Elders, for advice whenever issues arose during the project. These processes ensured that I, as a non-Indigenous person conducting research involving Indigenous people, did not take the ‘well-intentioned road to hell’ and ‘unwittingly participate in the Western hegemonic process’ (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 141).

In writing up the research, although all the participants agreed to be identifiable, I chose to de-identify most of the comments based on my respect for the participants’ intentions. I also wanted to avoid any possibility of reputational damage the findings or analyses could incur for the individuals, or to their associated workplaces.

### **3.6 Summary and conclusion**

Like Moellendorf (2007), as I conducted a policy ethnography with the RAPs, I explored ‘societal reconciliation, taken as a normative ideal, a goal that a polity might pursue through its public policy’ (p. 205). By using the RAPs, interview data and the self-study data, I have presented the lived experiences of this policy within the four universities. I note that the RAPs as policy takes us from a position of ‘policy as knowable and rational, to policy as having a broad range of illusory effects and constraints that are unreliable and unpredictable’ (Childers, 2009, p. 347), and therefore, was worth exploring. The next chapter further reveals how the self-study evolved into a richer, more complex version of the original self-study method.

## 4. Refractive reconciliatory self-study

That Australia claiming to be a Christian nation can possibly account for the injustices against these [Indigenous] people with specific regards today to their health! Because of the present situation I presume the European [Australians] may one day be accused of genocide.

*Sentences from my (author)high-school essay written in response to the question, 'The Australian Aborigine: How do you see his problems?' (Written in 1978)*

It's not about the land and you as descendants of Aboriginal people to come this way; it's about how *we* give that space. *We* have to do the reconciling. ... So something about if we the colonisers and the immigrants create the right space—the right way of being—then there can be a space for healing and meetings and a 'coming together'. That for me is something of what reconciliation is.

*Words spoken by me (author)with Jeannie Morrison in response to her question, 'How would you define the word reconciliation –the meaning, the feeling?' (Spoken in 2017)*

### 4.1 Introducing the Self-study

This chapter provides an account of the conversation between Jeannie Morrison and myself, when Jeannie interviewed me as part of what I came to call the 'Refractive Reconciliatory Self-study' (RRS). I have used words from the interview transcript with contextual reflective statements to tell the story of how our interactions came to shape a new hybrid research method, the RRS.

First, I acknowledge that 'writing oneself into a text depends on a certain level of honesty to self-implicate' (Tomaselli, Dyll & Francis, 2008, p. 368), yet given the broader research subject and the willingness of my participants to be identifiable, it would be cowardly and incongruous for me to not reveal something of my ontological and epistemological position. The implication from the research was that the Indigenous knowledges, my glimpses of 'katajininy warniny' on Noongar Country, were ontologically challenging and yet complementary to the ways of the Western knowledges system. The inclusion of a self-study

was the result of a research design that was an adaptive response to the policy ethnographic methodology.

#### **4.1.1 Jeannie and me—an introduction**

I am one of 4,068 staff working with 56,662 students at Curtin, one of the largest universities in Australia (Curtin University, 2019). I coordinated and taught communication skills for several years and now, for more than a decade, have been working in academic development roles in the teaching and learning centre of the university. It is in this central role that I have been privileged to work with many people across the university, including staff of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) and other senior First Peoples in the university. In this role, I became directly involved with the university's RAP. It was while reporting and helping to review and write the second university RAP, that I interrogated how it was being used within the university and in the sector more broadly.

Jeannie and I first worked together in 2008, when I coordinated the teaching staff induction program. When I started teaching this foundations program for teaching staff new to the university, any references or resources related to Australia's First Nations and their knowledges – or those of other First Nations – were non-existent. The university offered a workshop that was a 'cultural awareness for staff two day program—a Ways of Working with Aboriginal People', organised and delivered by the CAS, but it was not a requirement for staff to complete this program, and it could be done at any time during one's career. The foundations workshops, instead were a requirement for all new learning and teaching staff and to me, provided an opportunity to introduce staff to the local First Peoples in our university. It was important to also make known to new staff, how much the university valued the CAS and those who worked and studied there. I believed, the induction to teaching and learning at the university was incomplete, especially given the presence and rhetoric of the RAP, without this component.

The university's Indigenous governance policy stipulated at the time that any conversations about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had to happen with CAS. I had completed the cultural awareness program but had not worked as a colleague with anyone from the CAS, apart from when I attended meetings during the development of the first RAP, where I had met Jeannie Morrison, who was then managing the CAS library. Jeannie was to become my co-creator of this missing introductory module and instructed me as to what to include

and what to omit. A version of what we created exists to this day (in 2019); it is now a mandatory online module for staff involved in learning and teaching. One of its key aims is to prompt staff to engage in the various cultural awareness and On-Country immersion programs organised by First Nations staff at the university.

The workshop evolved further with the current director of the CAS, Prof Marion Kickett, and then the Elder in Residence, Prof Simon Forrest, both with whom I co-redesigned and co-delivered the workshop over the years. The workshop was also inclusive of other First Nations wherever in the world staff happened to be working. However, it had been Jeannie Morrison who patiently worked with me to develop the inaugural program. At the Foundations Colloquium of 2009, when all the Australian universities gathered to share and present on their staff induction programs, it appeared that Curtin was the only university to have such a module in their foundations of university teaching program (Goerke, 2009). The first Curtin RAP (2008–2013) gave our work further impetus by including the target: ‘For academic staff: expand the Foundations of Teaching and Learning at Curtin program to include an understanding of the differences between Western knowledges and Indigenous knowledges’.

#### **4.1.2 The refraction: being interviewed by the interviewee**

Even with this history of working together, the development in the project where Jeannie came to interview me, was for me a challenge..

The idea of being interviewed by a First Nations interviewee seemed to be an authentic way to infuse the thesis with my story of the reconciliation process at one university. I positioned myself on the other side of the research process, an action which is uncommon for researchers. The resulting interview process was created to address the fact that I was a part of the reconciliation and RAP story of the university at which I worked and fundamentally, as with many researchers, I had many years of experience living and working in ‘the cultural interface’ (Nakata, 1998). Repositioning myself from being the one who asked the questions and led the conversation, to the one who became objectified and was being explored, provided me with the opportunity for insights into the positioning of those who are less powerful within the academy.

From the start of the interview, I fumbled and was imperfect in addressing even basic questions about my identity. I located myself in terms of ethnicity, heritage and place, but Jeannie indicated that she had expected more from me saying, ‘Well, that’s a nice little brief story. That doesn’t really tell me who you are but you know ... We know a different you.’ Jeannie wanted me to tell her why I was interested in this subject, so I shared stories about my initial contact with First Nation boys when I taught secondary school on Yamatje country. I then spoke of my time when back in Wadjuk country, I had wanted to meet local First Nations women, and was offered work at a refuge for First Nation women. Jeannie then affirmed me saying, ‘That’s a much better story. It connects you!’

Jeannie’s response to my storytelling seemed to weave and mesh together a more complete story that was hers as well as mine. We created meaning for, and enactment of, reconciliation within the university together. Jeannie contributed more of her thoughts and gave such direction that our time together became a statement that defined reconciliation within the space of our university. For example, as part of my life story regarding how I had come to my current interest in reconciliation, I stated:

I really learned over the next couple of years [working with First Nations women] at Anawim Women’s Refuge [now Kamberang House] that I didn’t have to ‘do’ things in the way I’d always thought I had to ‘do’. It was about learning to listen.

Jeannie then responded:

Yeah, listen! Listen and that’s something that we find a lot of non-Aboriginal people don’t understand how to do. It is something very basic, very simple yet very effective. It’s just as simple as that really: listening and acknowledging I guess. Accepting.

This interchange encapsulated what the First Nations interviewees alluded to during the interviews: the significance of listening within this idea of whatever we in a university wish to label as reconciliation. By locating myself inside the study this way— asking a local Noongar woman who had experienced the first RAP at the same university as I and whom I had interviewed, to then interview me—I exposed my ontological and epistemological commitment within the reconciliation space. And to the need to listen. By swapping positions with the research subject, the process became refractive. Jeannie asked me to respond to my

research questions and listened to me, while I in turn listened to her ask my questions and then to her responses as she responded to listening to me.

## **4.2 Refractive conversations about RAPs and reconciliation**

In our refractive dialogue—it was not an interview—Jeannie referred to the colonial mindset and the consequent limitations of being educated in Western-only systems. She observed that this education meant that we were ‘conditioned and reconditioned’. She then commented on the acquisition of wisdom with age, with which I concurred and then she asked me about the first time I began working in reconciliation, ‘As part of your journey to lead you to this point anyway; to actually what made you think about taking this subject up as a PhD?’ My response was that ‘reconciliation is part of my own personal journey ... and I could see, that, for me it also has, not repercussions, but echoes, in this bigger story about who I am and who I want my kids to be.’ This led a to philosophical interchange, in which we discussed the power of words, especially in the university. Jeannie made an astute remark about the university’s third RAP, which was being compiled at the time:

See, I think even if there is another rewrite then the words again will change, because of the different place that we’re in ... I am hoping that it’ll have much stronger and supportive words, hopefully ... Well it depends who writes the words, where they’re situated in their world and how that impacts on us. Do they have the same meaning as we understand it? As we read it? ... Because we can see a different meaning in whatever that’s being said as you know, there’s always a double meaning somewhere.

This was another example of the refractions during our encounter, in which the shaping of a seemingly personally reflexive moment became instead a duet that formed and articulated a moment of reconciliation.

At one point, Jeannie directed the conversation into an exploration of connection to country and identity. We explored my primary connection to the country of the land of my ancestors, the Valtellina in the Alps of northern Italy, to which I feel a strong connection, and is something that Jeannie thinks many in Australia probably feel even if they do not articulate it. However, she differentiated this connection to another country, with that of many First Nations people, like herself, as not feeling a ‘pull’ to another part of the planet: ‘So, they’re Australian in some spaces and they’re another heritage in other spaces. If you can get my meaning of that? Whereas we’re grounded here all the time.’

This refractive conversation with Jeannie provided me with time to record my acknowledgement of her, and other First Nations, important contribution to Curtin's initial RAP reconciliation journey. The three First Nations staff members who were crucial to the RAP component of Curtin's formal reconciliation journey, were Prof Anita Lee Hong (of the Badjalla and Daarba Nations), the director of the CAS at the time, without whose explicit leadership and support there would never have been a RAP; Jeannie Morrison, (of the Bibbulmun Nation and Wagy Kaip Southern Noongar Nation), who, if she had not been prepared to be so approachable both informally and formally (e.g. attending RAP meetings during 2007), there may never have been a plan; and Michelle Webb, (of the Palawa Nation), who taught the class that had such a strong impact on Cheryl Stickels. Stickels described the impact of Webb's classes on her at the time, as, 'My head's exploded, my heart's exploded', leading her to instigate the first university RAP. There were many other First Nation colleagues at the time who contributed, patiently listened and were generous, but these three women were central to the success of the creation of the first RAP.

I have my own understanding of the Curtin RAP, having been part of the committee that helped inform the first RAP and then led the revision and reshaping of the second RAP with A/Prof Di Gardiner. Although it was staff in the university's Ethics, Equity and Social Justice Office who finalised the second (and third) RAP. I was offered workspace in the CAS so that one day per week, I could sit and work from there and be among the students and staff of the centre.. When telling the story of how Di and I met with senior portfolio leaders to receive 'sign-off from each of the areas, as to what they would be prepared to deliver on in the second RAP, I described the RAP to them as 'a bit of a mix of aspiration and actually determination and realisation'.

On the day of the refractive conversation with Jeannie, I had come from attending the university's peak committee meeting regarding Indigenous matters at the university and I had listened to Jim Morrison, Jeannie's brother, talk about his community leadership work in establishing healing centres. He also spoke of working from an office in the building, leased by Curtin, which was originally the place from which the once Aboriginal protector of Western Australia, AO Neville, had worked for many years. It is a place of immense intergenerational pain for Stolen Generation survivors, including Jim and Jeannie's family. When discussing the story of how Jim received access to, and use of, the office building,

Jeannie declared, ‘It’s like a—yeah I can’t think of the word but it’s like winning the war you know, almost. Put the flag back up and yeah it’s reclaiming!’

When we discussed the challenges of having a document that tried to articulate something as dynamic and multifaceted as reconciliation, despite the cynicism and lack of faith expressed by First Nations people, Jeannie was insightful about the difference between rhetoric and reality. She noted that in the environment of the university, for an intention or process such as reconciliation to have any authority, it must be written as a policy or some sort of official plan. She also conceded that even if it was a problematic document, it at least allowed for a conversation, which she affirmed was significant:

Jeannie: Well, for a document for a document’s sake, people don’t believe it unless it’s in writing, it’s a written text. I think people don’t want to believe some of that stuff or want to have to comply with.

Veronica: Well you and I work in a place that does value that—the written.

Jeannie: The written, exactly! But I mean, even if it’s something that you question, even if they question it, at least you can have a conversation about it then. You don’t like what’s being said then you ask why, why don’t you like it? What is it you don’t understand or what kind of feelings does it raise for you. Let’s talk about those sorts of things. Get an understanding of—learn a bit more about what it is that it is that upsets you about those sorts of things. It’s just information; it’s knowledge. If you work in a place like this then it can be of benefit to you at some point in your working life, if you’re in a career. If you’ve got a professional career outside of the university, the uni’s going to help you at some point in your life. At least if you don’t—you don’t have to love what you’re hearing or do but at least if you have some understanding it’s going to you know, not—it’s going to serve you at some point.

Our conversation ended in a discussion about the importance of individuals valuing their own story and heritage and this in turn making it easier for them to be empathetic and understanding of others. We came full circle to the statement about the common humanity we all shared: ‘We’re all supposed to be a little bit different but we all come from the same place. We all live on the same planet. It’s so obvious. [Laughter] Truth be known, we don’t own anything. None of us own anything. We’re all caretakers of the Earth’ (Jeannie). In discussing this and the fact that our university has campuses in places other than Australia and during our discussion about reconciliation and the specific Australian context of RAPs, we moved onto the UNDRIP.



At this point, Jeannie acknowledged the rights of other First Nations peoples, especially those in places where our university has offshore campuses—including Sarawak, Malaysia, in which the First Nations are the Orang Ulu or Dayaks—and she suggested that we could be a university that had the first international RAP, ‘because I mean everybody has a right to be able to come to the table and negotiate’ (Jeannie).

### **4.3 Reconciling in the ‘third space’**

#### **4.3.1 Self and connection to reconciliation and RAPs**

I do not seek to propose or justify a stance in this thesis that says anything about universities being the *only* places or even unique places, for creating knowledge that would build and achieve a ‘reconciled state’. However, I do challenge the fact that universities should be leading places for learning, researching and creating many opportunities for ‘spaces’ that lead to reconciliation between First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples. This is the version of Bhaba’s ‘third space’ in Australian universities, in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people meet, which Dudgeon and Fielder (1990, as cited in Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006) described as messy and involving struggle. However, unless you get into that space, ‘there is little scope for learning and changes nothing’ (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006, p. 408) because it is within that ‘third space’ that various forms of reconciliation are shaped.

I am not educated or shaped by ‘whiteness studies’ or CRT, nor do I have a background in anthropology or sociology. What has mostly shaped my thinking about Australian reconciliation has been my lived experience of relationships and encounters with First Nations in personal and work spaces over decades. This has included working in secondary and university educational environments, and being a participant in social justice activities in Perth during the 1980s until the early 2000s (e.g., the Catholic Social Justice Commission and participating in protests supporting Land Rights). These experiences were informed by earlier university studies and teaching secondary-school Australian literature and history. I am also cognisant that having an Italian heritage and being part of the white majority population, I am afforded significant privileges. I also acknowledge that our universities are based on Western universities modelled on Oxford, Cambridge and Bologna, and are heavily influenced by places like Stanford, Harvard and MIT rather than local Australian First Nations knowledges and what happens ‘On-Country. However, there is the Curtin Bush University (2017) which by September 2018 had evolved into a ‘Bush Learning Space’

(Curtin University, 2018). Interestingly, also during 2018, Macquarie University (2018) partnered with South-East Arnhem Land communities to create ‘The Wuyagiba Regional Study Hub’ in South-East Arnhem Land, which is another version of a bush university. Thus, I acknowledge in my reflections, that transformation is occurring in various universities.

This policy ethnography journey commenced with the first RAP at the university where I was working. The fact that it was a document that had taken more than 18 months to create, included input from many people across the institution and the wider community, along with the fact it existed in several formats—including a glossy, cardboard, coloured brochure, similar only to the university’s strategic plan—indicated that the RAP was of some importance. My input into the creation of this document was very small. I was part of the wider university community group that met over several months to discuss the input and to finesse the words that were to be used to formulate our first RAP. The resultant RAP provided a formula that gave the institution a clarion call to articulate and grow its understanding and work with First Nations people of Australia, starting with the local nation where the main campus was situated.

## **4.4 The evolution of a hybrid self-study research method**

### **4.4.1 Starting with self-study**

The need for a self-study was conceived as part of the interactive process when I received feedback from peers early in the research project, which further confirmed this as a valid self-study (LaBoskey, 2004). Although writing specifically about teacher education, LaBoskey’s (2004) explanation of the purpose and use of self-study reflected the purpose and process that I experienced through the inverted refractive interview with Jeannie, in that it ‘suggests that the validation of the local knowledge, the approximate, suggestive knowledge, thus generated must be on going’ (p. 860). I acknowledged that this was a moment-in-time and that the learning would continue and did not behave as non-Indigenous people who think they are cultural competent and believe that ‘they do not need to learn anymore as they know it all. Some believe they even know more than an Aboriginal person’ (Goerke & Kickett, 2014, p. 66).

A further aspect that shaped the self-study was connected to researcher positioning or standpoint when working in an intercultural space. Regarding anti-racism, Kessar (2006)

argued that ‘emphasis must be placed on understanding the self in the midst of unbalanced power relationships’ (p. 358). However, such scholars explored the space of ‘the other’ and I needed to add another layer of understanding about specifically researching the space in-between, because ‘in this contested space between the two knowledge systems, the cultural interface (Nakata, 1998), things are not clearly black or white, Indigenous or Western’ (Nakata, 2007, p. 9).

#### **4.4.2 Going beyond self-study**

I made the choice to go beyond the autoethnographic aspect of self-study. Spry (2001) defined autoethnography as ‘a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social context’ (p. 710) and Anderson (2006) added that it can be translated into different contexts to encourage researcher analytic reflexivity. The focus was not on me reflecting on me, but rather me reflecting on a First Nations Elder reflecting on me. The planned refractive conversation with Jeannie was not the first time I had been interviewed as part of this project.

The other instance had been unplanned and occurred when I met up with one of the senior First Nations academics for a scheduled interview. Upon my arrival, this Reconciliation Elder told me that he had now decided against giving an interview. My attempts to further explain were ignored and instead he invited me to have afternoon tea with him in his office. At the end of our time together, he informed me that he would now be happy to be interviewed and invited me to make an appointment to return another day, which of course I did.

I engaged in mindful self-reflection after that experience, but it was only later that I realised its significance. I had always declared that I was *not* conducting research about Australia’s First Peoples, but was researching something about the space in between we called ‘reconciliation’. . In conducting such an exploration, I could not ignore the fact that I was going to be interviewing people from Australia’s First Nations. However, First Nations people have so often been objects of, and objectified by research that to explore the concept of reconciliation required me to determine something of the elements of relationships, and respect for how such people were engaged in this process.

During my reflection, I realised that this particular Reconciliation Elder had lived and given generously during most of his life to this ‘idea’ I was now researching. At this afternoon tea, I had been given an opportunity to experience the reconciliation that I had claimed to be

using. I experienced a reconciliation methodology that was deeply infused with Dadirri and 'Boodja Neh', which included the deeper process of 'listening to one another in reciprocal relationships' (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 1993, p. 36). The 'afternoon-tea' interview was not the first time a First Nations person had explored who I was in the university reconciliation context, but it was the first time during this project and the interview with Jeannie Morrison was the second.

Jones and Jenkins (2008) explained this 'postcolonial cross-cultural collaborative enquiry' as 'working the hyphen' (p. 473) in their reflection on what was happening in a working relationship in which one person was a member of the colonising group and 'the other' was from a First Nation. Their words cautioned me not to slip into a romantic fantasy in my desire to create a more just and 'reconciled' university. Jones and Jenkins (2008, p. 482) further argued that 'such fantasy is a necessary but always troubled ingredient in cross-cultural work'. There is also the realisation of the 'impossibility of fully coming to know the Other' (Jones and Jenkins, 2008, p. 482), which is something I wanted to be mindful of as I revealed the findings of this project. This understanding was made clear when I engaged in the self-study and I was reminded that an interview over a couple of hours is but a glimpse of someone's thoughts at one tiny point in their life story..

When I described my interview experience with Jeannie, to my supervisor, Prof Zane Diamond (Ma Rhea), she suggested that maybe this special interview, rather than being a reflexive process, might be considered more of a '*refractive* reflexive' process. I felt that this additional word perfectly captured the dialogue and situation I had experienced, and what I believe Jeannie and I both had shared. This extra concept helped describe not only our conversation, but the larger experience leading up to it, and the follow-up conversations Jeannie and I had. Reflecting on those words with the ontological understanding that the exchange constituted a potential act of reconciliation, led me to name the hybrid RSS. The interview structure formed a sort of prism into which the interviewer and the interviewee put light (ideas, insights), which was then transformed (refracted) out the other side into a richer, broader array of colour than what had entered the prism. This form of self-study requires a special set of circumstances to occur in the first place, or to be repeated, and some practical guiding principles as to how to conduct an RSS have been articulated in Chapter 7.

## **4.5 Summary and conclusion**

My research design and overall methodological approach were shaped by the interviews of 30 individuals, including me as part of a self-study. However, these interviews were instigated by the initial document, the RAP, which provided the pathway for this policy ethnography which in turn led me back to reflect on my engagement with the documents and the reconciliation process. Given that I was writing about the significant process of reconciliation and as part of the refractory reflexive process of writing, this chapter has faithfully presented the essence of the refractive conversation I had with Jeannie Morrison. It has also demonstrated why a policy ethnography approach led to the ontological requirement for me to address the fact that the idea of reconciliation I was exploring in my research by talking to all these people connected to RAPs, was fundamentally about Australia's First Nations and I needed to look deeper at how and why I was conducting this research. Given my work as an educator, this pushed me to conduct a self-study, which demonstrated my commitment to 'doing reconciliation', from which the RRS was generated.

The next chapter describes the findings from the document and interview data weaving in further aspects of the self-study – which have been largely explicated in this chapter.

## 5. Research findings

Extracts from the four RAPs:

Vision statement for reconciliation—Individually and, therefore, collectively the university acknowledges that Indigenous and Western knowledge systems have much to learn from one another (Curtin RAP 2008–2013).

Our Business—The study of Indigenous cultures and perspectives will help ensure that courses are more responsive to international, national, community and professional expectations with respect to Indigenous knowledge systems (ANU RAP 2009).

Respect—Our aim is to create opportunities for staff and students to gain an understanding of the contemporary, historical and traditional cultures, values and knowledge of Indigenous Australians and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Melb RAP 2011–2013).

One of the visions reflected in the RAP—Encouraging a new form of engagement that harnesses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ability, knowledge and leadership (UoN RAP 2011–2015).

### 5.1 Introducing the findings

This chapter begins with words about Indigenous knowledges as written in the four RAPs—the documents that shaped this policy ethnography. The chapter itself consists of a description of the policy ethnography data, organised and presented to reflect the themes related to the document analysis of the RAPs. As it is not always possible to divorce the findings about the RAP from reconciliation more broadly, there is significant overlap in the discussion of the emergent themes. This chapter also contains responses to the research questions (see Appendices A and E) from both the interviewees and my self-study and are loosely organised under the following subheadings:

Level 1 basic descriptive analysis—provides a brief overview of the RAPs, the participants and their summarised responses to interview questions.

Level 2 thematic analysis—covers how and why the RAPs exist in universities, the continuum of reconciliation evident in those universities and evidence of how RAPs enact reconciliation and considers the future of reconciliation and RAPs.

Level 3 capstone analysis—synthesises the themes that answer the research question as elicited from the documents, interviews and self-study.

I have read, listened to and examined the data, and searched for patterns in the ways in which participants responded to matters associated with RAPs and the broader reconciliation process within the four universities. In presenting the data in this chapter, I have purposefully given precedence to the voices of First Nations interviewees, before positioning my non-Indigenous interviewees in response to those voices. I argue that giving precedence to First Nation voices is a requirement within the reconciling university and as this thesis is an artefact of a university, I am attempting to enact this in how I write this thesis.

## **5.2 Level I: Descriptions from the RAPs, interviews and self-study**

I differentiated early in the project between formal Reconciliation associated with the political movement in Australia and the informal, often incidental and personal reconciliation. I articulated the former as being capital ‘R’ Reconciliation and the latter as being small ‘r’ reconciliation (see Chapter 1). The data often revealed a conflation of explanations for these two versions of reconciliation, and mixed in references to RAPs because RAPs were the main strategic expressions of formal Reconciliation within the project universities. The RAPs were introduced in Chapter 1, but I have begun this Level 1 description with further information and comparisons between the four original RAPs. This is followed by comments about each universities current status regarding RAPs followed by before a summary of the responses from the participants to the interview questions. Finally, noteworthy similarities and differences between each of the RAPs as well as between the participants, are revealed .

### **5.2.1 Locating the RAPs**

RAPs, officially explained by the organisation that created, authorises and validates the plan, Reconciliation Australia, are defined and explained in the first two chapters. Here, I include explanations from the data, namely from interviews with the research participants and from an examination of the RAPs and associated documents. As of April 2019, nine universities have RAPs and of those, three of the four in this project still have a RAP. I was able to interview all the people who either instigated or created the first RAPs for each of the four project universities. As the Honourable Fred Chaney AO told me:

I think there are two ways a RAP gets started—well, there are lots of ways—but there are two broad streams and ways, and one is that the Chief Executive of the organisation becomes seized with the need to be part of this, and there's no doubt there's been some extraordinary leadership in the corporate sector from Chief Executives who've driven change within their organisations. The second way is when there are people within the organisation that drive change.

None of the university RAPs studied appeared to have been initiated by staff in the senior leadership team, although all achieved the sponsorship senior university leaders (VC, DVC and PVC). They then received support from Reconciliation Australia to be recognised plans within the universities, which were named and made available on the Reconciliation Australia website and also on university websites. The reasons why the four universities had RAPs are explained in this introduction to the four RAPs. For three of the four (ANU, Curtin and Melb), it was an individual within that university who had a connection to someone in Reconciliation Australia, which led to the development of the RAP. For UoN, it was connecting with and exploring another university's RAP (the Curtin RAP) that led to the creation of their RAP.

#### **5.2.1.1 *Curtin***

Curtin, a Unitech university, first publicly committed to reconciliation with Australia's First Peoples in its mission statement in 1998. In February 2008, it became the first tertiary institution to have a RAP. In terms of student numbers, Curtin had a significant number of Indigenous students during 2009 with 460 students, but by 2017 the number had not grown much, the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training statistics indicating that there were 476 Indigenous students (Powell, 2018a, p. 28). By 2017 the number had grown to 509 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2018).

The Curtin RAP was created after a staff member, Cheryl Stickels, wanted to 'do something' as she told me, about the inequities and injustices she had learned about while completing her postgraduate Indigenous studies at Curtin. She approached Fred Chaney, who was on the Board at Reconciliation Australia, which had recently launched the RAP program. He advised her to consider developing a RAP, which at that stage was only being targeted at business corporations.

In her interview for this project, Cheryl referred to receiving immediate support from her line manager, Director of Student Services, Michelle Rogers, and then working with the portfolio



leader, the DVC Academic, Prof Jane den Hollander, who also had the CAS in her portfolio. The director of CAS, Prof Anita Lee Hong, was also very enthusiastic. There was the acknowledged 'goodwill of many staff' (Stickels) to realise this first RAP, but it was the team of Cheryl, Jane, Anita and Fred who led the creation of this first RAP. Jeannie Morrison, one of the interviewees for this project, described Cheryl at the time:

I think that was what she needed to do. I think, just from something that triggered her consciousness – that this is something that needs to be done and she just went for it, which was pretty good on her part. She's very keen, a very strong woman. I think she did well to articulate the position that Curtin could be in in terms of how reconciliation would work.

In telling her story about the completion of that first RAP, Cheryl described it as 'a flawed document but nevertheless there wasn't anything to go by, just pure heart'. Curtin leadership gave it prominence, announced their university as being the 'first Australian university to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan' and named it as one of the highlights of the year in their 2008 annual report. An explicit reference was included to this RAP in the welcoming text from the VC, Emeritus Prof Janette Hackett, and it remained on the university website until Prof Hackett retired in 2013.

At the time of the first RAP, it was den Hollander who was the senior executive member accountable for the RAP, and Stickels was given 0.25 workload to work on it. For both the second and third RAP, it was/is the DVCA, Prof Jill Downie who has the RAP in her portfolio. During 2014–2015, I was provided with 0.5 workload to work on RAP-related activities. The university also employed a casual staff member, A/Prof Di Gardiner, who with me worked on a project to develop the second RAP. During this period, a senior professional staff member, Linda Lilly, also provided administrative support for RAP related work, including administration for the RAP committee. None of the positions associated with the RAP were formalised, but were rather assumed work duties that were self-driven and executed with support from line managers. When finalising the second RAP with Reconciliation Australia took longer than expected and with workplace structural changes and my involvement in this research, RAP related work was moved to another area of the university. During 2015, the RAP become the formal responsibility of the Elder in Residence with administrative support from the Office of Ethics, Equity and Social Justice, along with and workload allocation for relevant staff members. The second RAP named three contacts: CAS, the Elder in Residence and the Office of Ethics, Equity and Social Justice, and by the

time of the third 2018–2020 Elevate RAP was finalised, the Director, Corporate Values and Equity, who leads the Office of Ethics Equity and Social Justice was named as the co-responsible officer with the Elder in Residence. Curtin finalised its third RAP at the end of 2018, and in terms of governance, the RAP has (as of mid-2019) remained in the portfolio of the DVC Academic. The co-responsible officers remain the same and along with RAP resources and administrative support, are within the Office of Ethics, Equity and Social Justice. The RAP is named as one of the plans that provide ‘the operational framework for the Diversity and Equity Strategy to proactively address issues of equity, inclusion and diversity’(Curtin University, 2019c).

#### **5.2.1.2 UoN**

As a Gumtree university, UoN had a RAP that concluded at the end of 2015. Their RAP document stated that ‘all staff at the University, led by senior executive, will play a fundamental role in driving, reporting and assisting in the implementation of the RAP’. It went on to claim that ‘in all cases the responsibility for the outcomes within the RAP will be a collaborative approach between the Wollotuka Institute and the responsible area outlined in the plan’. This written statement was repeated by the key person, who was critical to the instigation of the RAP, Dr Leanne Holt. Holt spoke about being inspired by the Curtin RAP and brought back information from Curtin to the UoN to help them shape their RAP. She referred to how she and the DVC Academic and Global Relations, ‘felt that it would be valuable to actually inform the university’s strategic plan by developing the RAP, instead of the RAP being informed by the university’s strategic plan’.

At the time of the implementation of the RAP, Holt, who was the Director Indigenous Students Support, Employment and Collaboration, and the DVC Academic and Global Relations, Prof Kevin McConkey, were named as the two key contacts for the UoN RAP., the UoN’s Wollotuka Institute achieved Australia’s first World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium accreditation. This international affirmation of how the university worked with Australia’s First Nations and recognised their knowledges , gave them a special connection to other First Nations in higher education across the globe.

One participant told me that on 16 April 2015, he had returned from an IHEAC policy meeting in Canberra, in which their university was one of only two universities out of 39 that had sent their VC to the meeting, which indicated the level respect UoN held for the role of

this advisory body to inform government. That UoN was reported as being one of the top five universities in terms of participation rates in 2016 with 3.52 per cent of the student population identifying as Indigenous Australians, (Powell, 2018a, p. 28) is further positive information about how popular UoN is to First Nations students. When the RAP expired

### **5.2.1.3 Melb**

Melb is a Sandstone University and is the oldest of the four universities in this project. In contrast to UoN, Melb had one of the lowest participation rates, with only 0.72 per cent of their students identifying as being Indigenous (Powell, 2018a, p. 28). The participants revealed that the RAP was situated with the Murrup Barak Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development, with Professor Ian Anderson at the helm as director. One interviewee affirmed that the VC had ultimate responsibility for their RAP (though the VC was not named against any specific RAP target, see Table 5.3). Although the RAP document named the Director of the Murrup Barak Institute as the contact, the website (February 2016) also named Charles O’Leary, Associate Director, Murrup Barak, as the contact. The RAP is referenced in the university’s strategic plan, *Growing Esteem 2015–2020* in connection to supporting their ‘commitment to improving national participation in higher education by Indigenous students’ (2015, p. 9 ) and there was also a commitment to launch a second RAP during the life of this strategic plan (p. 26) (This second RAP was launched in March 2015.) In February 2016, the official Melb website stated that they were ‘one of only three Group of 8 universities to have a RAP’ and the ‘only Group of 8 universities to have a Stretch RAP’ (Melbourne University, 2016). In 2019, they are the only Group of 8 with an Elevate RAP.

Melb had made their first public statement related to Australian formal reconciliation agenda in 2008 to coincide with The Apology to the Stolen Generation by Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. The VC, Glyn Davis, used this occasion to also deliver an apology on behalf of the university. As of July 2019, Melb has the most extensive informative website of the four universities which notably contains not just information about their RAP, but is more broadly about Reconciliation and related activities. One example from the website is resources for staff to integrate Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum which can be accessed by anyone outside the university. Both Melb and ANU provided links from their RAP to Indigenous research in the universities.

#### 5.2.1.4 ANU

ANU is a Redbrick university, established in 1946. The university launched its first university-wide RAP on 30 July 2009, along with fourteen complementary ‘local’ RAPs that belonged to various colleges within the university. The project participants indicated that the overall responsibility for the RAP was with the VC. Neither the RAP nor the university website named a person or office as a contact for the RAP, but rather provided a generic email address. The ANU RAP was essentially situated in the university’s National Centre for Indigenous Studies, where the director, Prof Michael Dodson, also the Chair of the ANU RAP committee, was ultimately responsible for reporting on its outcomes. The university’s leadership in Reconciliation was evidenced by the fact that their RAP was preceded by the annual Reconciliation Lecture, with the first lecture delivered in 2004. When ANU announced the first RAP in its 2009 annual report, it began with the words, ‘One of the most important conversations in Australia involves reconciliation with the nation’s Indigenous peoples’.

ANU continues to have several local RAPs, but the current whole-of-university RAP (April 2019, covering 2018–2019) contains a humble but impressive narrative about the university’s RAP journey to date. The RAP available on the university website is explicit in explaining the university’s limitations and successes in its reconciliation journey thus far. It includes statements such as, ‘despite the lack of impetus behind the previous RAP, it was successful in bringing about some significant changes’. The ANU RAP is clear in its link to the strategic plan of the university and even names all the people on the RAP working group who developed the current plan. While Curtin and Melb have opted for the highest level RAP—the Elevate RAP—ANU has chosen an Innovate RAP (Reconciliation Australia, 2017c). Their plan acknowledges the significance of all the locally contextualised RAPs that exist across the university and claims the whole-of-university RAP ‘informs and unifies all Sub-Reconciliation Action Plans’ (Australian National University, 2019).

#### 5.2.1.5 *Starting the policy ethnography with RAPs*

Each of the universities publically acclaimed the fact they had a RAP, and were committed to reconciliation. For example, as noted, the previous VC of Curtin referred to the fact that Curtin was the first university to have a RAP in the text of her online welcome to the university. However, by 2019, the RAP was no longer mentioned on the Curtin university

welcome page, and instead a broad reference to ‘Indigenous reconciliation’ had become part of the positioning statement in the university’s strategic plan. Another example was the statement of Indigenous acknowledgement on the homepage, which is now evident on all Australian universities’ websites.

UoN also has an acknowledgement of the local First Nations on its homepage. With the links to ‘Indigenous collaboration, as well as a reference to Indigenous community engagement’ visible from its homepage, it appears that while UoN may not have a RAP, its commitment to reconciliation and to its First Nations more broadly, is at the forefront of defining the university (see Table 5.1). As previously noted, Melb has the most comprehensive webpages of the four and was the only university that made any reference to the upcoming National Reconciliation Week.

Each university had their original RAPs available as PDF document downloads and although they had to follow a template provided by Reconciliation Australia, all four were quite distinct in appearance (see Appendix B). Table 5.1 provides an indication of some further basic information from the document analysis of the first RAPs that initiated the policy ethnography, along with some comparative data about the 2019 RAPs. This table also indicates if the RAP is named within the associated plans of the four project universities.

**Table 5.1: RAP and reconciliation references in plans and websites**

	Enterprise agreements (18/07/16)		RAP targets explicit in strategic plan		Visibility of RAP on university website
	Jun 2016	Jan 2019	Jun 2016	Jan 2019	As of January 2019
<b>Curtin</b>	X	✓	X	✓	Start at the ‘About’ Tab then ‘Who we are’ then ‘Vision, Mission and Values’ before finding the sidebar link to RAP—this is 3 clicks in from homepage and not intuitive
<b>ANU</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	RAP is available from a tile that is 3 clicks in from Tab labelled ‘Strategic planning’ – not visible on home page. Not intuitive
<b>Melb</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	Reconciliation at Melb is 3 clicks in and not intuitive: ‘Reconciliation’ tile available from ‘Strategy and Leadership’ link. ‘Reconciliation webpage is current with several related pages
<b>UoNe</b>	✓	✓	✓	no RAP	Link to Indigenous Collaboration visible when you scroll over ‘About UoN’ on homepage. In the second sentence there is a reference and hyperlink takes to their ‘UoN Reconciliation Statement’

#### **5.2.1.6     *RAPs and related plans: document analysis—similarities and differences***

The research data further revealed some commonalities across institutions as well as some differences. The idea of formal Reconciliation via a RAP was brought to life in the four universities in different ways. For example, the office of the DVC Academic at Curtin championed and resourced the first RAP, although it was done in partnership with the most senior Aboriginal person on campus. However, for the other three universities, the first RAPs were situated and led by senior First Nations people, although they too appeared to have received central funding. UoN was the only one of the four universities to leave the RAP program after the first RAP and have created a whole –of – university narrative about reconciliation connected to their strategic plan. The reason for UoN choosing to no longer have a RAP was implied by one of the interviewees, in that the ‘VC would say Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education ... and the Cultural Standards ... are part of the DNA of the university’. The more recent descriptors of the other three universities in 2019 also have words and images on their websites that link their activities to First Peoples. See Table 1.1 for how the RAPs are linked to other key university documents.

The Reconciliation Australia website, under the specific FAQ ‘Can I develop a RAP without Reconciliation Australia’s endorsement?’ is clear that people are not allowed to use the words ‘Reconciliation Action Plan’ and ‘RAP’ without their permission as they are registered trademarks owned by Reconciliation Australia (2019b).

One of the Reconciliation Australia staff responded to my observation that the RAP ‘belongs in some ways to Reconciliation Australia’ saying that ‘the RAP doesn’t necessarily belong to us. It is owned, implemented and should be a living thing that exists within an organisation’. However, the RA website declares, and the experience of the participants prove, that Reconciliation Australia *does* own and define what a RAP is and only Reconciliation Australia can review, determine and approve of a plan as a RAP. This is not only on the website, but also on their downloadable information sheets (Reconciliation Australia, 2018).

#### *University Strategic Plans and reconciliation*

The importance of First Nations to universities can be further evidenced by how they are named in the most significant public document, the university strategic plan. During data collection in 2015–2016, though Melb and ANU referred to First Peoples in their strategic

plans, only UoN made explicit reference to reconciliation. By January 2018, all the project universities had incorporated references to Australia's First Peoples, and Curtin also had an explicit reference to reconciliation (see Table 5.2). In terms of a broader reference to Indigenous education, UoN's current ten-year strategic plan names Indigenous education under the section on excellence and discovery. The other universities refer to Indigenous education in terms of parity of student enrolment and retention under their equity and social justice sections. UoN has also included the following statement which includes an acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledges:

Our areas of excellence in education and research have scale and span discipline, regional and national boundaries. We recognise that research, discovery and access to new knowledge are at the heart of a world class education. We are resolute in our commitment to excellence in Indigenous education and research and to the importance of Indigenous culture and knowledges.

More than a decade ago, Gunstone (2007, 2008) completed analyses of university policy documents and his inclusion of a simple table displayed the number of universities that mentioned First Nations in relation to the named subjects in the university strategic plan. I have adapted Gunstone's table (see Table 5.2) by adding the four project universities and referring to their 2018 strategic plans:

**Table 5.2: Universities that mention issues in their strategic plans**

Issue	2000	2007	2018(project universities)			
			ANU	Curtin	UoN	Melb
<b>Reconciliation</b>				✓		✓
Governance	0	0	✓			
Employment	2	1	✓	✓	✓	
Research	0	0	✓		✓	✓
Culture and cultural awareness courses	0	4	✓		✓	
Anti-racism policies	0	0				
Curriculum	1	1	✓			
Student access and support	6	5	✓		✓	✓
Student success, completion and retention	2	1	✓		✓	✓
Refers to Aboriginal education strategy	1	1	✓			
No mention of any Indigenous issue	5	3				

(Based on Gunstone, 2008. p. 106).

In terms of strategic plans, ANU made 23 references to First Nations and related education matters, covering several aspects relevant to Reconciliation and addressed in their RAPs. There are only a few references to First Nations from the other universities. Interestingly, ANU have a lower-level RAP than Curtin and Melb.

### *Enterprise bargaining agreements and reconciliation*

An enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) ‘sets out the terms and conditions of employment between an employee or group of employees and one or more employers Fair Work (2019). Wright (2002) referred to the responsibilities of the university sector to challenge racism and quoted the NTEU’s Indigenous Education Policy, which states that, ‘as sites of critical learning, universities are powerful agents for social change and have a responsibility to provide an environment free from racism in all of its forms’ (NTEU, 2000, as cited in Wright, 2002, p. 38). However, the results of an NTEU survey in 2018 reported that racial discrimination and racist attitudes in the universities across the country appeared to be increasing (Powell, 2018b). The moderating factor was the EBA so that universities that had an EBA where the rights of First Nations were named in some way, ‘had a better success rate dealing with these [racism] issues than the universities that haven’t had them in an agreement’ (Powell, 2018b, p. 28).

In January 2016, apart from Curtin, ANU, UoN and Melb all referred to RAPs in their EBAs. However, in the 2017–2022 EBA, Curtin does refer to the RAP. In terms of the annual reporting requirements to Universities Australia on their Indigenous Strategy, Brown (2014) noted that anything to do with reconciliation was ‘commonly added as an addendum’ (p. 17). In the 2014 article, Brown commented that only three universities mentioned reconciliation in their EBA—the University of South Australia, University of Tasmania and the University of Ballarat (2014, p. 17). It was noted that RAPs may exist independently of EBAs and that the NTEU encouraged the implementation of RAPs, but unless they were named within the EBA, actions were not binding. Table 5.4 provides further information regarding the university RAPs, including the fact that although three of the four original RAPs claimed that their RAP addressed racism, only ANU actually used the word in their current RAP. Instead, two of the current RAPs referred to ‘race relations’ (See Table 5.4), which was a label provided by



Reconciliation Australia for one of the five dimensions of reconciliation that must be addressed in a RAP.

### *National and International documents and the RAP*

Curtin's second RAP was explicitly based on recommendations from the Behrendt et al. (2011) report's recommendations and the endorsed requirements from Universities Australia. UoN's RAP was also based on targets from Universities Australia requirements, but other RAPs mentioned other documents or plans.. The current Universities Australia *Indigenous Strategy 2017 to 2020* makes reference to RAPs, but none of the current RAPs refer to this strategy document. The UA document is clear that RAPs are only 'complementary to, not a replacement for, central policy documents (Universities Australia & NATSIHEC, 2017, p. 28). The Curtin 2018–2020 RAP mentions the UNDRIP in the introduction from the VC and the Melb RAP names the UNDRIP as a guiding document.

## **5.2.2 Locating the people within reconciliation and with RAPs**

At the onset of the interviews, participants were asked to identify themselves and say who they were within the context of the topic to be discussed (they each were provided with the information sheets regarding the research project). This was a somewhat muddy question for those who already knew me and their answers may have been less informative because they assumed that I already knew them. I used the same introduction with everyone, in which I named myself and explained why I was interviewing them and the immediate response as to when they first became engaged in activities associated with Reconciliation, which I have discussed here.

The 20 interview questions changed slightly from the original set used with the first participant (see Appendix A) to those used with the final participant (see Appendix E). Consultations with the reference group also affected the ordering of the questions. What was retained were the five themes that were created to address the project's key research question and a summary of the responses are provided below.

### **5.2.2.1 Simple introductions**

The first group of questions established the individuality of each interviewee and their history of engagement in the reconciliation process. All interviewees agreed to be identifiable and

where relevant in this document, I have named them and clearly given them attribution. Other times, I have chosen not to explicitly identify them as I wanted the reader to focus on *what* was said, rather than *who* said it. In this basic introduction, I do not name the participants, but instead have indicated something of their heritage or connection to place using some of their own words. I have also organised them into four groups: non-university personnel (NUP); senior executive academic staff (SEAS); middle management staff (MMAS); and professional staff who were not MMAS (PS). Note, for this section, [I] = Indigenous and [NI] = non-Indigenous.

### *NUP introductions*

These five people were not employed within the university sector but had long-lived experiences working in reconciliation-related activities and were all involved in the RAP process of the four project universities:

The interviewees were:

- Interviewee #1: [I] This Indigenous woman was enrolled in tertiary reconciliation studies, had been engaged in related activities from school days and was currently actively involved in RAP related work.
- Interviewee #2: [Ni] A non-Indigenous woman who had grown up in regional Australia and had ‘consistently made choices to work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and had consistently made choices to work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs for the past 10 years’.
- Interviewee #3: [I] A Yuin man who had worked in reconciliation-related education for many years.
- Interviewee #4: [I] A Wakka Wakka man who ‘totally believe[d] in the whole [Reconciliation] process of how to bring corporate Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities together’.
- Interviewee #17: [NI] A non-Indigenous man who had worked in the reconciliation space, including RAPs, for many years and who had ‘been involved with reconciliation for virtually a lifetime’.

### *SEAS introductions*

This group were members of the senior executive or senior administrative sections of the universities and consisted of a range of people from PVCs through to Chancellors. These people were all academics and had explicit leadership accountability related to one or more of the RAPs:

- Interviewee #7: [I] A PVC ‘with strategic responsibility for Indigenous Strategy’ and ‘a background in Aboriginal health and am a public health physician professionally’.
- Interviewee #8: [NI] A PVC with ‘responsibility for learning and teaching programs and the way in which the curriculum relates to Indigenous Australia and the way in which it serves our Indigenous students’. Spoke of working with Yorta Yorta people in the Goulbourn Valley.
- Interviewee #12: [NI] A DVC who had the RAP and the university’s Indigenous centre, in their portfolio. Remembered inquiring about Aboriginal people as a five year old.
- Interviewee #19: [NI] PVC. From an Australian offshore campus. Commented: ‘When I first came to Australia [as a student]... that I first heard this word—reconciliation.’
- Interviewee #20: [NI] A VC. Someone who had ‘always taken a very deep interest in exclusion. I am very conscious of exclusion and what it might mean because I lived through that whole period of apartheid as a white South African, highly privileged, educated’.
- Interviewee #24: [NI] Acting DVC Education. Had operational responsibility for Indigenous Education Unit; ‘seminal moment’ as a university student—‘living with my Aboriginal flatmate made me realise that her life’s journey to that point was so different from mine’.
- Interviewee #26: [NI] A PVC at the time, someone who had been working with First Nations since they were an undergraduate. Gave strong evidence of commitment to students.
- Interviewee #27: [I]. A university Chancellor who came ‘from Darwin. My family on my mother’s side are Kungarakana ....on Dad’s side is Iwaidja, which is over in Cobourg Peninsula. ... Then Woolwonga is my father’s mother’s side.’ This person has been in leadership roles related to reconciliation for much of his life.

### *MMAS introductions*

This group consisted of senior First Nations people who were directors and whom bar two, were in professorial positions. They had leadership positions, such as being heads of centres and with significant budget responsibilities. They were responsible for the delivery of RAP-related targets and directly informed the senior executive, although their positions appeared to have limited power in the strategic governance of the university:

- Interviewee #6: [I] Kamilaroi person from Barraba New South Wales who had accountability for monitoring RAP and government Indigenous policy programming background.
- Interviewee #11: [I] Held an Elder position. 'A Whadjuk Ballardong Noongar, so this is my country.' Recalled first involvement in reconciliation was going to a suburban primary school in a 'reconciliation van' during the early 2000s.
- Interviewee #13: [I] Spoke of being a Noongar and that as 'this university sits on Noongar Country, so that does impact on my position in this university'.
- Interviewee #15: [I]. Descendant of the Badjalla and Daarba peoples, a senior university manager with long commitment to Human Rights.
- Interviewee #21: [I] 'My mob's from the Anaiwan ... I've never lived on the country'. Had two leadership roles in the Indigenous area.
- Interviewee #22: [I] A Worimi person 'from the other side of the river here. Involved in reconciliation entire life I suppose.' This scholar had written 12 books and 'done lots of things'.
- Interviewee # 23 [I] A Worimi person from the Karuah area, who led the development of the RAP in that university.
- Interviewee #28: [I] From the Jawuru peoples of the Southern Kimberley region of Western Australia, who was involved in reconciliation 'probably since it started as a national policy approach.' Described by another senior First Nations participant as a person with 'cultural capital'.

### *PS introductions*

These participants were all women who worked for either the SEAS or the MMAS. They were part of administrative teams who at some point were involved in either developing, writing the reports for Reconciliation Australia, or maintaining the RAPs in terms of the

paperwork. Most of them had never been engaged in reconciliation-related work before they took on these roles:

- Interviewee #5: [NI] Advisor, Indigenous Strategy and Social Compact, who worked in partnership with senior Indigenous staff. Spoke of supporting students as young staff member in previous roles, so ‘I suppose in that sense I’ve been involved in reconciliation type work since—that would have been 1993’.
- Interviewee # 9: [NI] A manager of Partnerships and Development for the Indigenous Centre of the university, who worked with senior Indigenous staff member to create the first RAP and was involved as an older adult in reconciliation activities.
- Interviewee #10: [NI] Reported on the RAP and worked in the equity and diversity office of the university. Involvement was recent through the work role but noted that they had ‘been aware of the events, the cultural celebrations, NAIDOC’.
- Interviewee #14: [NI] A South African migrant, who would ‘always retain family characteristics and love of the bush and the animals and so forth for Africa’ but who was ‘more Australian than African’. This person had been supporting RAP administrative work for a few years. ‘I’ve always been involved in the whole fundamental, I suppose, turmoil within tensions between races. Since even when I was at university’.
- Interviewee # 16: [NI] Person who worked in counselling and was an RAP instigator. ‘My playmates were Aboriginal kids but I never questioned that they sat at the front at the pictures and I sat at the back with the better view and I never questioned that the kids went home to the reserve at the end of the day or indeed why they should’ve lived on the reserve’.
- Interviewee #18: [I] Person from the Bibbulmun Nation and Wagyu Kaip Southern Noongar region in the southwest of Western Australia, who had long-lived experience working with non-Indigenous people and was a member of the first university RAP committee.
- Interviewee # 25: [NI] Migrant from UK with fewer than 10 years in Australia. Involvement in reconciliation was work-related; said they researched what it was when they were employed as ‘it [reconciliation] meant absolutely nothing to me’. Responsible for reporting on the RAP.
- Interviewee #29: [NI] Person of Zulu descent who was an adult migrant to Australia in the early 2000s and was actively involved in the RAP committee for three years.

### *Locating the interviewee-researcher with the other interviewees*

My positionality was established in Chapters 3 and 4. Although who I am is established throughout the thesis, , similar to the other participants I include some words from my interview transcript:

The name I was born with was Veronica Maria Tavelli. I am a first-generation Australian and I am of migrant parents from the northern part of Italy, from a little valley, the Valtellina. I live in Perth, here in another little corner and I have lived in the same place most of my life, in the same little corner of Wadjuk Noongar Country.

#### **5.2.2.2     *Basic definitions for a RAP and reconciliation***

##### *Reconciliation Australia's definition of a RAP*

In defining the RAP, several interviewees repeated versions of the explanation provided by Reconciliation Australia, which I have already referred to start the policy ethnography, stating that a RAP is 'a business plan that turns good intentions into actions. A RAP publicly formalises an organisation's contribution to Reconciliation by identifying clear actions with realistic targets' (Reconciliation Australia, 2013). The current definition is that a '(RAP) program provides a framework for organisations to support the national reconciliation movement' (Reconciliation Australia, 2019a).

##### *Interviewees' definition of a RAP and reconciliation*

These two quotes encapsulated what people understood RAPs were about:

I think it's very easy for a RAP to become a nice statement up on the wall. I mean, RAPs were meant to replace what had occurred up until then with Reconciliation Statements, which were essentially statements of goodwill and recognition, and you've had them framed and put them up on the wall. But the RAP was to produce something which was more action oriented (Interviewee #17).

The following statement alludes to the sometimes uncomfortableness of the RAP because it is a plan that came from another organisation outside of the university system: 'I think it's a great idea but it's a concept that has come from outside into the university and has its own

skin, its own body and it has to fit into the university structure of how we do strategy' (Interviewee #10).

Reconciliation, along with RAPs are further explored in this chapter but the introductory definition belongs to Calma, who in 2019 was still the co-chair of Reconciliation Australia:

It depends on how you really interpret reconciliation and what it means and what reconciliation in Australia's objectives are and generally what reconciliation is about. It's about respect, it's about understanding. It's about sharing stories and in our case, in Australia, it's about understanding our history and to try and educate the community to appreciate that pre-colonisation, which was only 230 years ago, for the previous 60,000 years, Aboriginal people walked this Earth. So, it's about getting that understanding.

*A definition of a Reconciliation from the self-study*

Part of my explanation for the concept was that:

reconciliation is something about how we—and I say 'we' now as me as a child of migrants and those who colonised this country before me—how we find a more right place and space to be with the First People and the land that we are here living in ... We have to do the reconciling.

To further enhance and complete the definition, here are words offered by Prof Simon Forrest, the Elder in Residence at Curtin, who reminded me that the idea of reconciliation was often promoted based on a convoluted lie that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people had once had a good relationship and that both groups had to now work on getting back to that good place. Forrest stated more strongly than me, that it is non-Indigenous people who need to make the effort:

The concept of Reconciliation when it first started, there were Aboriginal people that weren't necessarily agreeable to it ... about reconciling and defining the term what reconciliation actually means. I mean to be reconciled you need to have been somehow connected in the first place, where that hasn't happened. To me that was all just semantics. The whole idea was about Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people working together and in particular the non-Aboriginal people taking responsibility for—in negotiating and working with Aboriginal people—in negotiating what needs to be done. And how non-Aboriginal organisations and people could help and assist and work with Aboriginal people to achieve the sort of aims that we were looking at.

### **5.2.2.3     *The future of reconciliation and RAPs***

The final group of questions challenged the interviewees to contemplate reconciliation and RAPs going into the future. These questions invited them to revisit their initial comments regarding reconciliation and RAPs and to talk about their current feelings within the university and more broadly. The overall responses indicated that although change in the sector was slow—‘if the university is serious about trying to make change then I think they have to show that in a big way or a different way’ (Interviewee #18)—there was hopefulness and a desire to share good news stories regarding what was happening on their campuses, and that reconciliation, and RAPs, had a future.

### **5.2.3     Similarities and differences between people and RAPs**

In revealing some comparisons, I am mindful that it is I who have interpreted and summarised what the RAP documents contain and what participants have said to me. The resulting themes then become portholes for the reader to look through and hopefully see what important. There were remarkably little differences in the responses from participants, which could be attributed to the universities, work roles or gender. However, differences were apparent between the Indigenous participants and the non-Indigenous participants relating to two topics. One notable difference was how Indigenous rights and reconciliation were linked. This aspect was raised by most of the First Nations participants, but by only two of the non-Indigenous participants.

Only the original Curtin RAP made a reference to Indigenous rights, which was made in the context of its vision for reconciliation, in stating that it ‘supports the right of Indigenous Australians to express their cultures and participate on an equal footing in all aspects of Australian life’.

The other critical difference related to the feelings expressed towards formal Reconciliation. Although all bar one of the eighteen First Nations interviewees were involved in working on RAPs, several expressed their reservations or conflicted feelings about the concept. Two of the non-Indigenous participants, along with me, were the only three non-Indigenous participants who expressed wariness about Reconciliation on the grounds of the historical issues related to the formal political reconciliation agenda in Australia, which were identified by all the First Nations participants. These are noted in the following sections.



### 5.2.3.1 *Formal Reconciliation and the three pillars of RAPs*

Since 2013, Reconciliation Australia has provided a definition of reconciliation, which is a complex story built upon what they term the ‘five critical dimensions that together represent a holistic and comprehensive picture of reconciliation.. (See Section 1.3.2.3 for further information on the five dimensions.) During 2018, Reconciliation Australia also began to show support for ‘constitutional and legislative reform based on the recommendations of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and commented on their past work,, including the Recognise Campaign, making statements such as that now, ‘Reconciliation can no longer be seen as a single issue or agenda and the contemporary definition of reconciliation must weave all of these threads together’ (Reconciliation Australia, 2017d).

However, while the Reconciliation Australia participants and most other participants referred to ‘the three pillars of our RAP’—relationships, respect and opportunities—in their explanations of reconciliation, there were no references made to these five dimensions. One of the participants encapsulated the responses with the rhetorical statement: ‘Is it a process? Is it an end thing? I guess, the reason why I am saying this is that it really is, it comes down to the building relationships a lot. Any reconciliation process is about building relationships’ (Interviewee #23). This complemented the statement by one of the Reconciliation Australia respondents, who said, ‘in a nutshell that it is about building meaningful relationships, demonstrating respect and creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It’s about coming together and working together’.

This theme of reconciliation being a muddy and nuanced concept, especially for First Nations, was raised often and is reflected in the following statement, where Interviewee #23 suggested that people, including other First Nations, move on in terms of the word ‘reconciliation’ and instead consider thinking about the concept differently:

I think maybe we need to talk more about the principles behind reconciliation instead of just reconciliation. I think sometimes people don’t understand exactly what reconciliation means—I know that’s a whole strategy, to actually educate and talk about what does reconciliation mean, but I think we’ve been talking about it for a long time now. I think that we need to take the next step.

### 5.2.3.2 *Relationship, relationship, relationship*

It is noteworthy that the key formal reconciliation words, which are all central to the RAPs (see Table 5.4), especially the word ‘relationship’, are also the words most often used by the interviewees in their explanations about reconciliation. The word ‘relationship’ is often used to define the central aspect of reconciliation, with the additional concept that it is a long ongoing process. There was no differentiation between formal and informal reconciliation when it came to naming relationship as the paramount principle and key feature. This relationship was always about the connection between people—in this instance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples—and was referred to with preceding adjectives or other words, including the words: two-way, reciprocal, symbiotic, change enabling, building, mutual, management, progressing, institutional, strengthening and meaningful. Fundamentally, the participants were clear that ‘it comes down to building the relationships a lot. Any reconciliation process is about building relationships’ (Interviewee #1).

The following interchange between two non-Indigenous ‘Reconciliation Elders’ (see 6.4.2) captured a definition of reconciliation. Chaney had been explaining reconciliation, including the aspect about ‘Closing the Gap’, when he stated that right relationship was the critical concept and should be at the centre of anything to do with the formal process of Reconciliation. He was unequivocal that this was essential for change to occur:

Most Australians can understand that the idea of ‘Closing the Gap’ in circumstance is something to do with reconciliation. In a way the widespread adoption of RAPs indicates that there’s not a large intellectual gap there. People do understand that that gap is an affront to the idea of a reconciled country. To me reconciliation is yes, practical reconciliation, critically important if people are dying early, if people are not getting an education, can’t get a job, are in gaol or being bashed up, I mean of course that has to be a part of the story. A critical part of the story! But it’s in fact *the relationship* which underpins basic change.

Stickels affirms his statement strongly, stating, ‘I agree! It’s *always* relationship, relationship, relationship so far as I am concerned. *That’s* where you start’.

### **5.2.3.3     *Remarkable attributes of interviewees***

#### *Resilience, patience and hopefulness*

My observations while conducting this research included noting the admirable resilience of the First Nations people I sat and listened to. I met with people who clearly had repeated the same messages about reconciliation several times over their lifetimes and who yet persisted with their messages within university environments that intuitively should be more informed and open to transformation than most workplaces. Instead, universities too are complex and challenging for First Nations peoples who have often spent a lifetime enacting reconciliation, and thus non-Indigenous members of the academy are called ‘to appreciate that they are in no position to know about Indigenous experiences, struggles and aspirations and so to appreciate the gift of Indigenous labour to re-educate the institution’ (Bunda et al., 2012, p. 954). As evidence, 11 out of the 14 Aboriginal participants explicitly spoke about having been involved in reconciliation their ‘whole life’, even when ‘it wasn’t called reconciliation’ (Interviewee #15). One of the Aboriginal participants was very precise in answering the question by referring to their active involvement in the formal political process with the RAP in the university over the past decade. This same participant had been involved in Aboriginal rights activism during the 1980s and 1990s, but they were very specific about discussing Reconciliation as a formal political process in the university and were clear that their engagement in that arena was recent. The other two were high-profile people and were also specific about their engagement in the formal, political Reconciliation process in Australia as being differentiated from other informal everyday reconciliation activities.

This theme of having ‘hope for future in the next generation—in reference to the higher education environment’ was not evident in the non-Indigenous participants. Non-Indigenous interviewees, were more likely to express their frustration with how long everything was taking, and that reconciliation was so slow that ‘it’s like wading through treacle to get change, I think, sadly’ (Interviewee #14). However, with the First Nations participants, hopefulness, patience and resilience were strong because of their belief that change would come with later generations. As Prof John Maynard stated: ‘Certainly from an Indigenous perspective, the big shift for us in higher education is going to be the next generation—the ones that are at school now’.

### *Curiosity and life-changing moments*

The non-Indigenous interviewees, in leadership positions and those who had chosen to work with First Nations over many years, had significant curiosity and interest in the First Peoples of Australia, which was evident in their childhood or early adulthood. The empathy and courage to lead for a rights-based reconciliation by non-Indigenous people, appears to take many years to incubate. The key finding here was that this was about a very long-term, ongoing process and learning by listening to First Nations over time.

As already noted, the non-Indigenous interviewees, apart from the two who became engaged in reconciliation work because it was part of their job description, had significant moments of insight in their lives when they realised the injustices and brokenness of the relationships between Australia's First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples. For these non-Indigenous participants, this was part of their awareness that as descendants of settlers and migrants, they were part of a complex messy colonial history.

When they experienced a negative situation related to First Nations, these participants responded with significant curiosity, empathy and a need to take action. For example, Interviewee #12 passionately declared her lifelong 'big interest in Indigenous issues and culture'. When working in the university sector, the death of from heart disease of a First Nations colleague in her 40s, followed by that colleague's replacement having to leave after two months because her 40-year-old husband died unexpectedly, together provided the impetus for her becoming more actively involved in leading change in her university.

I remember just being horrified ... at the time and just thought there's got to be something! We've got to do something about this. You can't just have this happen all over the place and not actually be trying to make a difference for the better in terms of education, not just of Indigenous people but of non-Indigenous people, about what it's like for Indigenous people (Interviewee #12).

### *Gender and reconciliation work*

Both men (12) and women (17) were interviewed for this project in terms of their engagement in the RAP process, however, some interviewees noted the fact that it was women who seemed to be more involved in university reconciliation work. The responses did not uncover any discernible differences in responses between the people in terms of sex or

perceived gender. One of the Reconciliation Elders (see Chapter 6) was clear that the involvement in reconciliation activities in universities and even reconciliation in the broader community, had been dominated by women, stating that ‘I’ve been troubled at times by a lack of blokes in the active group’ (Interviewee #17).

### *Brief update 2019*

At the time of the interviews, there was little evidence of anything unique to differentiate the universities within the higher education ‘marketplace’. However, a desktop audit in 2018 and then again in May 2019, revealed that all four universities were showing signs, via news items posted on websites, that they were all planning to do ‘something’ noteworthy and possibly distinctive in terms of reconciliation and RAP-related (for three universities) activities.

These actions included: Curtin had formalised a partnership with local Nyungar Elders and Greening Australia’s Gondwana Link to create the Nowanup Bush Campus, which was the main location for the On-Country units that students have been able to enrol in as part of their course of study since 2014. This process was preceded by evidence of reconciliation leadership by the VC and senior executive team when as a group, they travelled 450km to camp overnight in rudimentary conditions, ‘On-Country’ with local Elders and students. There they listened to the Noongar Elders before participating in a public ceremony to acknowledge the beginning of the partnership. Further, during National Reconciliation Week on 29 May 2019, Curtin was one of two universities (Swinburne University of Technology was the other), along with 12 big businesses, including BHP, Qantas and Herbert Smith Freehills, that took out a full page advertisement in The Australian newspaper, expressing their support for the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (Curtin University, 2019b, Anangu Uwankaraku Punu Aboriginal Corporation, 2019).

ANU launched their third RAP in January 2018, organised a First Nations Governance Forum in July 2018 and were talking about a plan for the creation of a National History and Reconciliation Centre. Also, the ANU RAP was singled out and applauded in a national report because it ‘sought to embed strategies, systems and structures that would reflect a whole-of-university approach driven by the senior deputy vice-chancellor’ (Buckskin et al., 2018, p. 56). UoN no longer had a RAP but they had more Indigenous staff than other universities and 3.5 per cent of their total enrolments for 2017 were Indigenous students,

which was higher than the national average. Melb was strongly encouraging of current and future First Nation students in how it offered them several options, including several scholarships and exchange programs for Australian First Nations students and First Nations students from North America.

In terms of RAP related governance in 2019, the positioning of the RAP differed between universities (see Table 5.3).

**Table 5.3: More comparative facts: original RAPs versus current RAPs**

	<b>Curtin</b>	<b>Melb</b>	<b>ANU</b>	<b>UoN</b>
<b>No. of pages in current RAP v. original RAP</b>	31 v. 8	48 v. 12	21 v. 16 (WoU RAP)	No RAP v. 4
<b>Positioning of current RAP only</b>	RAP subsumed into the 'Diversity and Equity Strategy—for Australian campus only	RAP directly linked to WoU Strategic Plan	RAP named on Strategic Planning page as 'strategic initiative Also named is 2018 First Nations Governance Forum	X
<b>VC named responsible for targets</b>	3 v. 3	X X	2 v. 1	X X

Note: An 'X' means that the item does not exist.

The Melb RAP sat independently directly under the university's strategic plan and was labelled as a university-wide plan. Further, Melb have placed the RAP as the overriding plan over their six Indigenous-related plans and frameworks (Melb RAP, 2018, p. 15). Curtin's RAP was positioned as one of several plans, including The Gender and Sexuality Action Plan, all which were under the university's diversity and equity strategy. although only ANU and UoN made any references to engaging with Indigenous knowledges in their original RAPs (see Table 5.4), research was named in all the RAPs,

#### **5.2.3.4 Summary of Level 1 analysis**

The data was rich with multifaceted explanations of reconciliation as lived and understood by the interviewees. The tables in this section provide summaries of some key points, including similarities and differences between the RAPs. It is noted that the realisation of the RAPs as plans approved by RA, were the result of commitment and work by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in all the universities. UoN decided to leave the RAP program, but Curtin,

Melb and ANU all have current (2019) RAPs. All the universities continue to express strong commitment to Reconciliation.

All the interviewees expressed commitment to working for reconciliation between First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples in universities. An understanding of the RAP program was evident amongst interviewees as a way of articulating formal reconciliation in a university. Some expressed frustration with the RAP, and others were strongly supportive of the RAP. Some interviewees expressed (strong) reservations about formal Reconciliation, though all were working in reconciliation related activities. Many interviewees talked about reconciliation in a university being a slow process, and First Nations people referred to reconciliation evolving over generations.

### **5.3 Level 2: Emergent themes regarding RAPs and reconciliation**

The key themes that emerged in response to the questions from interviews and the self-study and then bounced back into the RAP documents were focused on the following: how the RAP and reconciliation were understood, people's reasons for the RAP, their understandings of governance, leadership and organisational culture related to the RAPs, the connection between reconciliation and RAPs and the future of reconciliation in Australian universities. Each of these topics were linked back as main themes in the policy ethnography. One of the Reconciliation Australia participants explained:

A RAP is for organisations particularly when they want to turn their good intentions into *doing* something good in the space. It's also really more I think for *them* to then set out what an organisation wants to do in this space by following the simple framework: relationships, respect and opportunities. (Interviewee #4).

#### **5.3.1 The state of university RAPs**

There were many words and images used to describe the RAP and the process of reconciliation, which reflected the complexity of the idea and the 'tool'. References were made to reconciliation being like a ride, which was either 'smooth sailing', or 'bumps and dips' (Interviewee #22). One person summarised the sentiment about the potential emptiness of the rhetoric saying RAPs were 'just words and it's just a plan and nobody really adheres to it. Nobody really wants to work with it. It's just there and people say well we've got the RAP and it's all nice, but what are you doing? There's no action' (Interviewee #13). This was also

explored in the RSS when Jeannie and I discussed the significance of words and the ‘written text choices and our understanding that words on a page are essential in a university context’ (Jeannie Morrison). This relates to the importance of semantics when creating RAPs which was emphasised by one university’s senior RAP sponsor who commented that the RAP committee ‘often got bogged down on a word, which was exactly as it should be, getting the words right was so important!’ (Interviewee #20). However, as a comment of on RAP committees, another participant acknowledged the altruism of members but questioned the role and purpose of this committee:

It’s from the goodness of your heart. So there’s no real support structure for that committee. There’s no requirement of that committee to do anything, to have goals, or achieve things. I am not 100 per cent what the purpose of the committee is, apart from saying that we have one (Interviewee #25).

#### **5.3.1.1     *RAP as a symbol and a token***

Symbolism was discussed by the participants within the context of the RAPs. While one of the interviewees who employed First Nations staff noted, the only ‘tangible outcome for the RAP that I’ve seen is definitely associated with employment’ (Interview #21), they went on to say that ‘everything else’ was all symbolic activity. Another interviewee in a senior leadership role referred to the suspicion that can surround documents like the RAP, because ‘there’s symbolism around the RAP and some people, myself at times, can be a bit cynical about symbolism’. He then attached this statement to an explanation around tokenism, in that people may consider some of the simple symbolic actions, like flying the Aboriginal flag, to be tokenistic, but he conceded that this was also a positive sign of ‘a kind of incremental change’. He warned about the need to strike a balance between making these changes and lapsing into tokenism within the university because ‘academics and students are smart—they can smell out tokenism from 100 paces!’ (Interviewee #26).

An associated comment by a Reconciliation Australia staff member regarding universities and their RAPs, that some were still ‘quite tokenistic and quite isolated to specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander units.’ This was echoed by a First Nations participant, who acknowledged an improvement from the first RAP in that the current one ‘certainly isn’t Indigenous centre focused and certainly isn’t the responsibility of the Indigenous centre’s director anymore for its implementation and monitoring and all that. That’s done by other staff in the university and that’s the way it should be’ (Interviewee #11).



### 5.3.1.1 *Spaces and places for RAPs*

This leads onto the theme of the place of a RAP. There was a need to find spaces and places for RAPs, which are ‘extra’ external plans amidst a myriad of internal plans in a university. A senior executive staff member was clear in arguing that, as part of the reconciliation vision for a university, the RAP targets must be embedded into the university strategic plans and local area plans:

I think it’s good to have an understanding of the University’s vision for reconciliation and frameworks around it. But it’d also be good if you had an operational plan which is tied to the strategic plan ... We are a higher education institution so we should have targeted space ... So if you explicitly state that there is a target, I think it’s easier for faculties to then work towards achieving those targets. So not only do you have an overall plan for the university, but you have targeted plans (Interviewee #19).

Even though I did not directly ask about the place of RAPs, I was told that RAPs were positioned in varied ways and places in each institution. There were interviewees who were committed to reconciliation, but expressed derision for the RAP. One interviewee referred to the time a colleague from another university announced their university was getting a new RAP. This interviewee was dismissive in his response to his colleague:

I said it is meaningless. It’s just a piece of paper to make them feel good. The reality is, what else does it deliver once these things are in place? I mean I have to say, you get them in place and what else comes out the other end? (Interviewee #22).

At the other end of the spectrum, there was strong, positive endorsement of RAPs by a senior university staff member:

I am not saying you have to fight to make an Indigenous strategy legitimate, of course it would be seen as legitimate, but when it’s such as crowded space the RAP elevates the prominence, The RAP gives it a kind of national status. It’s a very important device and it’s been used very strategically by [senior First Nations colleague] (Interviewee #8).

#### *The RAP in ‘the Indigenous centre’*

Though there is no mention in the RAPs about who does the work and how or where they are positioned, several First Nations participants spoke about how, if the RAP was in the Indigenous centre, it is the First Peoples in the universities who are expected to then ‘do

reconciliation’ and manage RAP work. The outcome of this was often that RAP related actions were left to be done by First Peoples – as it would *they* who would benefit if the actions were attended to. As was astutely explained to me by Prof Peter Radoll:

Unless the Aboriginal unit or the ‘Aboriginal person’ gets strongly involved in the implementation of the RAP, very little happens in many cases. That’s just the nature of it because there’s an expectation that the Aboriginal person will do the RAP because it’s meant to be *their* RAP and that’s not true. It’s the institution’s RAP and the institution should take full responsibility for it and then implement it. Like I said, I’ve been in institutions, a number of institutions where this stuff’s gone round and round and round in circles and the reality is if no one leads it then nothing gets done. Often the person with the most—with a vested—interest, which is usually us, our mob, if we don’t lead it then we don’t get anything out of it. That’s just the truth unfortunately.

Three of the four original RAPs were situated within the Indigenous centres of those universities and the other was situated directly with DVCA office. Two of the current (2019) RAPs are situated with Indigenous centres, one with the Office of the PVC, University Experience and the other in the university’s Ethics, Equity and Social Justice office.

Making a RAP the responsibility of the Indigenous centre of a university was confirmed to be wrong by many interviewees, such as Interviewee #16, who was integral to compiling a first university RAP. This person noted that it was a well-meaning RAP, ‘but we made it the Aboriginal responsibility to do’. However, they later added, ‘we got very clear very quickly that it’s the other way around. That it is about the efforts of non-Aboriginal people to absolutely understand the work that has to be done by that group, but absolutely in consultation with Aboriginal people’.

#### *RAPs in the ‘equity bucket’*

Frustration was expressed by various First Peoples at being subsumed as one of the many equity groups in a university, further diminishing their distinctive voices: ‘We’ve now been swallowed up in the *equity bucket*. I much preferred it when we were the only institution in the country that had us on the front page as one of the major priorities of the university’ (Interviewee #22). The budget allowed for a limited amount of money for the research and teaching and learning around Indigenous matters and thus any other efforts on top of that to allow for Indigenous perspectives requires further budget. Putting everything in the ‘equity bucket’ means there are access to funds—though in competition with other ‘equity groups’.

Linking the RAP to ‘equity’ as being problematic, was a strong theme in the interview data and was connected in juxtaposed against Indigenous rights. RAP work was often positioned to be in the equity offices of universities or in the Indigenous centres, as these appeared to be the most sustainable way to maintain the RAP in terms of budget, and administrative workload around reporting (which was also about budget).

#### **5.3.1.2     *RAPs as aspirational documents***

The struggle between the purpose of RAP documents as being aspirational rather than having real, achievable targets, or having a combination of both, was also noted: ‘the plan's aspirational on the one hand, as it should be, but it's also something that we can measure our performance against’ (Interviewee #26).

Also, the RAPs appear to be complex mixes that displayed tensions between practical and aspirational targets, which though Reconciliation Australia (2019a) indicated is acceptable for RAPs, can add to confusion regarding meeting targets. This challenge was noted by one of the participants who compiles the RAP reports for Reconciliation Australia:

How the strategies and the work undertaken is linked to the targets is what I view as the loose connection. For me, because of the nature of my role, strategy should be driving the initiatives that we’re doing and those initiatives should be reporting back to see whether we’re meeting those targets that we’ve set for ourselves. Do we have the right targets? (Interviewee #10).

#### **5.3.1.3     *The RAP templates***

Interviewees commented that the four templates offered by Reconciliation Australia are not always helpful for creating a plan that is relevant to their specific environment. Some interviewees referred to the challenges of complying with the templates. Others spoke of probably not renewing their RAP in the future, and instead referred to considering alternative documents or other reconciliation related options rather than using the RAP. However, there was acknowledgment of the positive aspects of having the RAP as it was a plan that motivated people and helped them to aspire to take action:

I think RAPs have a really important role to play. I’ve become a huge advocate for them. Some of my colleagues just shoot me down for this, because they don’t necessarily agree. But when you can look across different sectors and different areas, you realise just how important these RAPs are. To be quite frank—and I don’t want to be too negative about this—but they don’t

mean a great deal—to anybody actually [laughs]. They're more of an aspirational document, but it starts the conversation and that's really, really important (Interviewee #21).

#### **5.3.1.4    *RAPs challenging racism***

The explicit question about the connection between anti-racism and RAPs confirmed that RAPs could be used to fight racism, although most people responded more broadly by saying it was reconciliation that addressed racism. A strong explanation for how a RAP could address structural racism came from Prof Ian Anderson, who also cautioned how a RAP could just as likely be something about posturing and performing:

Look, it depends how superficial or not the strategy is. I think that the further it takes you into a kind of a deep look at what are the institutional barriers to change, the more that the issues like racism, anti-racism need to come to the fore. But if the RAP is really a fairly superficial and symbolic agenda—like flagpole raising, NAIDOC Week, that sort of stuff—it's not going to take you to that point ... you have to go back and look at our colonisation and the university's involvement in colonisation and look at the sort of dialogue around addressing some of the university's racist past. So those issues can be there, but you can craft some agenda that never touches that sort of stuff. It depends on how much you want to seriously look at the mechanisms that really are kind of barriers to change.

Others affirmed the potential of RAPs, and more broadly Reconciliation, as part of the educative process to explicitly address racism across the globe::

Anything that removes ignorance and builds understanding, which I think RAPs have got the capacity to do, is going to help us with combating racism. Racism and bigotry is largely driven by ignorance and fear, because you're ignorant, you fear the other. Whereas reconciliation can allay those fears, remove that ignorance, if it's embraced (Interviewee #28).

Some First Nations people spoke of their connection with people of colour because these people too understood the concept of being 'othered'. This was conversely referred to by a non-Indigenous interviewee of colour who spoke of feeling empathy with Australia's First Peoples. And yet another non-Indigenous participant, referred to the impact of her white South African heritage on why she is aware of the impact of racism:

I spent my childhood in South Africa. I left South Africa at the Soweto riots, never to return until there was democracy. So, I've always taken a very deep interest in exclusion. I am very conscious of exclusion and what it might mean

because I lived through that whole period of apartheid as a white South African, highly privileged, educated.

#### **5.3.1.5     *RAPs and employment opportunities***

The RAP assisting employment for Indigenous peoples was a clear theme from all who were clear that RAPs were about jobs. This was encapsulated by a senior First Nations interviewee's words: 'I mean, hand on my heart and all due respect to all the effort that's put into RAP, the best outcome is really in employment'. Many participants were unequivocal in asserting the importance of this aspect of RAPs for the enactment of Reconciliation in their university. Calma also confirmed that RAPs were, along with relationships, about 'also looking at ways to create opportunities for people. So it's not about just getting people in at base level, but to be able to progress through the organisation. They also look at issues like procurement'. Dodson too reiterated that the RAPs may not be a perfect tool, but they are about non-Indigenous people working with Indigenous people to create employment opportunities:

It's not the be-all and end-all, but it's our gesture towards inclusiveness and understanding and recognition that bad things were done in the past and we're going to try and get beyond that now. I think that's the sentiment that I would like to imply in RAPs, but perhaps it's an inclusive gesture that bears benefits for everybody involved. And if it involved generating employment, of course, it's of great benefit to an individual Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and their families who might benefit from that.

This was supported by Reconciliation Australia staff who explained that 'the three pillars of our RAP is(sic) relationships, respect and opportunities. It's also this opportunity piece. Most reconciliation processes—there's also usually a call out for some economic development of some sort to happen'.

#### **5.3.1.6     *Leadership and accountability for the RAP***

The need for leadership of the RAP was a strong theme, which was provoked by the direct question about who should lead the RAPs. Holt explained that the shared leadership enacted at UoN appeared to work because their centre for Indigenous students, the Wollotuka Centre, used this model:

From an operational point of view, it's the responsibility of the DVC Academic. So they definitely were there as being responsible for all of the

areas, but so were the directors of Wollotuka. I thought it was important that it was a shared responsibility and again it's about that weaving, that you can't just have one without the other because there needs to be integrity in how things are done. There needs to be that expertise provided. I think that by having a shared leadership model as far as the senior executive and the directors, I see it like a shared leadership model, but they take their responsibility for the university's commitment and we take our responsibility for providing the expertise and the advice that ensures that what they do is going to be—meet the values of our communities and meet the expectations of our communities.

The question of accountability for RAPs was encapsulated by Anderson: 'So, it's a distributed accountability model, with the upside that you can actually embed that accountability. The downside is that there is a risk that something slips'. Calma also alluded to this distributed leadership and ownership model for the RAP:

It's about the organisation demonstrating a commitment towards reconciliation and articulating that through a document that's owned by the organisation. Not owned by the principal of the organisation but the total organisation and that's the real value and what's so encouraging.

Others confirmed that it was the responsibility of the wider university community and that a distributed leadership model worked rather than the implied hierarchical one in my question about who should drive the RAPs. Interviewee #26 was in a senior position and had a long-lived experience of working with First Nations people both within and outside the university, when he said:

Well, I think it's [the RAP] everyone's responsibility. When you say drive it, it's an implicit sort of top down focus a bit in that word 'drive'. Who's to facilitate it? Who's to engender it? There's lots of different words you could use in terms of who takes responsibility. So it's a collective responsibility (Interviewee #26).

Even though interviewees, and the RAP documents, appear to support a distributed leadership model for enacting a RAP, there was also a clear call for strong leadership from the senior executive, including the VC. This leadership 'from the top down' also included notions of leading as being collaborative and even transformational. The interchange between Stickels and Chaney exemplified these ideas about leadership. To start with, Stickels was categorical in her response as to who should drive a RAP, and how this leadership should look:

'it should be driven from the top down. I think it should be by example. I absolutely believe that, because so much flows from the temperament and the

personality of the person at the top. If you've got the right person at the top it's that person who sets the standard and the expectation'.

Chaney agreed and added that Reconciliation also needed to have people (staff) committed to continuously attending to it and reminding the university about its significance:

'Unless you've got a clear message from the top that this matters to the organisation, you haven't got a chance really. A group fighting in its own little wars through the organisation can achieve things and perhaps very worthwhile things but if you are to shift the culture of the organisation then without a commitment at the top ... It's like in a mining company you've got to have attention to the environment; you've got to have attention to industrial relations, to safety of your workforce. These things you're either making it better and better or you're going backwards, that's the choice. You're never static. It's only kept going by having absolute attention to it. Reconciliation in a way is like that. ... you've got to have a structure within the way this is managed that keeps people's eye on the ball and which can actually pull people up if they're falling off the pace.

### **5.3.2 The state of reconciliation in the university**

The depth of understanding of the complex idea of reconciliation, specific to the university context was exceptionally rich. However, not all could speak with as much experience as Calma and say, 'So, I have a very, I guess, reasonable understanding about universities across Australia and how we operate and how we could and should and do operate'. Apart from the people who worked at Reconciliation Australia, the interviewees had a minimum of five years' experience working within or with a university. It is noteworthy that the formal reconciliation process and its problematic history in Australia was reflected back to me by several of the First Nations participants and one non-Indigenous participant. These people acknowledged that it was within this space that good could happen, but there was also a wariness about the process and how the RAP could enable, or disable Indigenous rights.

#### *The central concept of relationships*

The importance of relationships underpinned all participants' explanations of reconciliation. These spanned from definitions about a two-way, equal effort by both First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples type of reconciliation, to one where, it was about the non-Indigenous people putting in more effort into making the connection and initiating the work to reconcile. The phrase 'two-way' was used in the context of reconciliation within universities and included the concept of 'reciprocity', which is a term often used when discussing the

intercultural space. Reconciliation was described as being a dual responsibility, in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people need to make compromises and contributions to 'getting things right' and developing a relationship:

Reconciliation is all about building partnerships. This is a key concept for how this work can happen in a university 'I don't know that I can achieve much in the whole RAP process except be part of the support part that helps, you know, walk alongside the people that feel they need change to happen (Interviewee #14).

It was also described as an intangible concept that you only really know about when it is not happening: 'Sometimes you can't even put it into words because it is a feeling. It's a more subjective kind of thing ... It's everyone working together. It's lots of things happening in parallel. It's not a series of isolated events (Interviewee #2).

Several First Nations people I interviewed believed that it was for the non-Aboriginal people who should undertake the reconciling because First Nations who have nothing to be reconciled about; non-Indigenous people need to do the work: 'Take two steps even if the Aboriginal community take one-step, take four steps towards them so that we can actually reconcile in the end' (Interviewee #29).

RAPs were proposed, as you will recall, as a way forward for the non-Indigenous people. The RAPs must be done by non-Indigenous people in partnership with their Aboriginal colleagues because it's us reconciling with them about what we have done (Interviewee #20).

The RAP's not about us, it's about Wadjellal. So that's it. If we really want something like that to be accepted in the institution, by the broader university community, it can't be just driven out of the Aboriginal centre in a university, it needs to be driven by the leadership of the institution. (Interviewee #21).

Calma added a further dimension in the work and focus of the RAP, by saying that though the Indigenous people support a RAP, 'it's not our [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people] burden that has to be addressed. It's the non-Indigenous, the mainstream culture that has to be addressed.'



### *Reconciliation summarised*

One of the First Nations interviewees gave an explanation for Reconciliation in Australia in a way that encapsulates all the conversations I had. This interviewee referred to another First Nations person in describing reconciliation as a ‘softening-up phase’:

I reckon there’s a middle space. There’s that awkward bit where you don’t want to ask—like how Aboriginal are you and that sort of stuff? [laughs] What makes you Aboriginal? Those awkward bits; there in the middle. That’s the best—I reckon that’s the place where we both should be (Interviewee #21).

Maybe this is just a sort of a ‘softening-up phase’ where we get to know each other and then after that we can get down to real business. I think it’s a part of the process and a part of that joint journey that both the communities need to go on. I agree wholeheartedly that’s what it is, that’s exactly what it is and whether you call it softening up or whatever, he [Aaron Bird Bear] was just using it as a sort of tongue in cheek tone but it’s really just getting to know each other and that’s going to just take a little bit of time (Interviewee #21).

### *The importance of community*

The concept of community was complicated but also an aspect of the discussions regarding reconciliation in the academy. Some participants used the word multiple times, especially in reference to how their institutions engaged with First Nations. Clearly, there was something about universities having to engage with the community, as opposed to individuals, in negotiating and translating reconciliation. There were references to community engagement in all the RAPs and it relevant to shaping reconciliation in the future.

Prof Richard Baker expressed a deep understanding of the concept as he spoke of his 30-year connection to a First Nations community as being all about reconciliation. He referred to a painting hanging in his office, which was painted for him by one of his First Nations student:

I keep that painting there for that reason: because it is a powerful reminder to me of the power of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians learning from each other when we develop genuine two-way relationships that value both Indigenous ways of seeing and non-Indigenous.

He referred to the Indigenous students who come from around the country as being connected to communities and also talked about active Indigenous learning communities that were created at the University several years ago, which existed for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and were evidence of ‘a two-way relationship’. These learning

communities were portrayed as significant to student life at ANU as were the relationships between some of the residential halls at the university with Indigenous communities. Baker spoke of the university listening to the communities: ‘The University is listening to our Indigenous students, our Indigenous colleagues and our Indigenous community about what they think’.

### *Reconciliation as heart before head and hands*

The theme of a connection between heart, head and hands has revealed itself because the participants who have worked on reconciliation spoke and expressed themselves both verbally and nonverbally with passion and strong feelings. In defining reconciliation, references to the heart were made multiple times by individuals such as Interviewee #27 who stated ‘before Reconciliation, what has always been in my heart and what I’ve seen in my own country is tolerance for other people’. Another example, of how connection and feelings are important is revealed in the following interchange. Here Stickels addressed Chaney directly in acknowledging his work and his emotional commitment to that work, and Chaney, in turn, confirmed the importance of emotional connection in reconciliation related actions:

Stickels: ... you also have the capacity to say the heart thing that I am always grateful that you’ve said. I’ve listened to many of your speeches and I’ve listened to the moment when your heart is revealed and I think that this process of a RAP at Curtin has relied heavily for us all bringing those things to the fore: the action and the heart and I think you’ve encapsulated them wonderfully. You might’ve popped in but you certainly continue to remind me that both are needed and I’d like to think that in our own ways we know the actions being required and we’ve been like little ducks occasionally, calm on the top, flat out on the bottom, but it’s always been about heart. It has always been about relationship.

Chaney: I reckon there’s absolutely no doubt in my mind that there’s an intellectual and an emotional content to this and when you’re trying to shift attitudes, the emotional content really matters.

### *Reconciliation as a long-term construction process*

The notion of building and construction was referred to in explaining the process of reconciliation: ‘I see reconciliation, it’s around—yes, relationship building and mutual—around mutual respect and mutual responsibility as well’ (Interviewee #15). Others, such as Interviewee #23, used the concept when referring to the capability of a RAP to combat racism, saying it ‘removes ignorance and builds understanding’. She referred to

‘reconciliation as the relationship that we build between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal’, ‘building on that [Indigenous] knowledge’ and ‘build that [Indigenous knowledges] capacity within the whole University’. Similarly, another participant from the same university referred to reconciliation, including the ‘capacity building’ of Aboriginal staff and the ‘need to build an entire university-wide strategy’ (Interviewee #3). Another participant referred to the significance of ‘relationship building’ when working with Aboriginal people, especially in a research situation, and claimed that ‘it’s all about building up trust and respect and connection’ (Interviewee #9).

### **5.3.2.1     *Rights and reconciliation***

Participants in three of the four universities spontaneously raised the subject of Indigenous rights, which I then sought to explore further with them. None of the original RAPs mentioned rights or the UNDRIP, but in the current RAPs, ANU names the UNDRIP as an ‘informing’ document for their current RAP, and a brief allusion is made to it in the VC’s welcome to the Curtin RAP. Two groups of participants introduced the discussion about Indigenous rights connected to the concept of reconciliation as being an easy way in to have deeper conversations about rights and treaties.

Some participants immediately responded to the question about involvement in reconciliation with a reference to human rights. One participant’s answer to the first question about her engagement with reconciliation was, ‘I guess I’ve always had an interest in human rights’(Interviewee #15). Only one participant specifically named the UNDRIP document in response to my question about the RAP having a connection to the document by referring to the importance of the UNDRIP and the Universities Australia 2011 document on the *Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* as being connected to the RAP. She also reiterated that the first important document is a university’s overarching strategic plan. This participant, along with others, noted AIATSIS as being of significance also to First Nations in higher education.

Prof Michael Dodson explained Indigenous rights as he told the story of the time when he first became engaged in work related to reconciliation. He referred to the fact that he and others who worked in Indigenous rights, found that once reconciliation was on the agenda, had opportunities to talk with people with whom they’d never had a chance to talk to before. It was almost as if the space created by this idea of reconciliation as propagated by the first

CAR, allowed for various groups to sit at a table and listen to each other. He referred to the opportunities for conversation created by the national reconciliation agenda:

I got involved in some discussions and it was interesting that for really the first time, we were talking to a lot of different people. When I say we, you know, people who were active in Indigenous rights. We really didn't talk much to the conservative side of politics, for example, or a lot of folks you might consider as being middle class ordinary who were non-Indigenous, who were white folks, either children or grandchildren of migrants or migrants themselves and not always English first-language people. That was new, I thought that we were actually sitting down and talking to those people and the Council itself was as cross sectional as it could be, I guess.

The broader concept of Indigenous rights somehow being integral to reconciliation, was referred to many times by many of the Indigenous participants.

#### *Sovereignty, rights and justice*

Indigenous rights along with self-determination and Indigenous sovereignty were all talked about as the way of the future by all the Indigenous participants—they spoke of how to keep and carry forward these ideas—encapsulated by Holt:

We now have a responsibility to leave our own legacy and what's that going to look like. I think that's about preparing our students to think about the legacy they're going to leave, because who we are and our culture, is dependent on the generational sharing of knowledge.

Interestingly, the term 'social justice' was only referred to once, but the concept of 'justice' and lack of it, was raised in the majority of the interviews. People used the word when telling stories about why they were involved in activities related to reconciliation, which is clearly expressed here by Interviewee #17 as the motivation for working for reconciliation:

It's never been an academic matter for me. I mean it's been really a straightforward *justice* issue really ... I think that was my lifelong experience—that I kept coming across what seemed to me obvious injustice which needed to be addressed. It's never been academic. It's always been a pragmatic engagement for me. Then you realise there has to be a framework for making it better so you have to change the frameworks.

### 5.3.2.2 *Reconciling knowledge systems in the academy*

Unsurprisingly, given the context, there were several instances when the discussion turned to the concept of knowledge. The context varied but the key focus was on how Indigenous knowledges were often juxtaposed against, rather than beside, Western knowledges. Some non-Indigenous leaders understood and admitted that the universities were deficit for not including Indigenous knowledges as part of their structures:

One of the things we always forget is that there is another way of learning in this world. It's not just the way we do it in the Western ecclesiastical culture that all of our universities are following—the Westminster model. Here, in Australia, there's another way of learning and it's from our Indigenous people, our First Nations people, who have their way of learning. There is much to be learned from it (Prof Jane den Hollander).

Prof Kickett referred to using the RAP to help the university prove that it values Indigenous knowledges:

We can employ mature age Aboriginal people with their knowledge. I put this forward in saying that the university has to value Indigenous knowledges and we need to look at, do they need that piece of paper? No, they don't, not when it comes to understanding and having the knowledge of Aboriginal culture. So we're employing them mainly for their Aboriginal culture.

Holt also spoke of the related problem, when she said:

Sometimes the universities get confused in that they see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education as being one thing. But it's not one thing! We're no different to an engineering discipline or a health discipline. We have our own knowledge systems and our own knowledge base which in a learning environment, needs to be supported by research and teaching and learning.

Prof Beena Giridharan, a senior staff member on an Australian offshore campus, raised the subject of researching and preserving Indigenous knowledges as part of the reconciliation agenda by valuing the preservation of Indigenous languages:

I mean Indigenous knowledges; you have students who are studying about engaging with the community or learning about their practices so that you can identify what is it that we can help to improve lives for them in terms of health or education or whatever. At the same time these types of research studies could also document and record the kind of knowledge that could be lost forever. ... I am speaking from the context of Sarawak as well, because most of the languages are oral and there is a need to speak to the older community

who has been living in very close proximity to the environment compared to the younger generation that don't have that knowledge. If the languages die, that knowledge will die too.

### **5.3.3 Governance and RAPs**

The question around the reason why RAPs existed, led to discussions about governance, leadership and about the overall organisation and how the RAP fits in with or affects other plans. One of the Reconciliation Australia staff said, 'We usually get a bit of an insight into how those organisations are run and are governed and set up structurally. We usually get this when developing RAPs with organisations, we usually are able to speak to senior leadership levels'. However, they admitted that their access to universities was limited. As one of the interviewees who supported senior staff in writing the first RAP at her university stated, 'I think a lot of universities are very good at writing business plans. The RAP is kind of a business plan. You could write it and then just tick it off but would your organisation change? No!' (Interviewee #9).

Most interviewees indicated that the RAPs were ultimately the responsibility of the VCs. This is encapsulated by one senior Aboriginal participant:

The RAP should have visible support from the VC and not just an introductory note at the beginning of a RAP. Their actions have to be seen so that others see that this is a university requirement and the RAP has the support from the highest person in the institution. Others will think 'well if it's important for the VC, it should be something of importance to me as part of the university group (Interviewee #15).

Strong consistent and explicit leadership by people in the highest positions in universities has been unanimously referred to as essential if reconciliation—both formal Reconciliation and informal reconciliation underpinning the formal—is to be realised in the short-term or long-term. Unless people in senior leadership positions in universities, who have the authority lead a RAP, participants indicated progress and transformation would be limited. As M. Dodson said to me:

What I think is crucial is that the top of the university has to drive it ... usually what happens in most institutions if the top of the pyramid says it's going to get done, it gets done. If you've got people here and there locally doing stuff some of it might be done really, really well, to the highest possible standards, but generally they'll struggle.

### 5.3.3.1 *Indigenous leadership and Indigenous staff overwork*

There was a strong theme about the universities using the RAP to advocate and promote First Nations leadership:

If the initiative is right, you are creating opportunities for those Level Fours but you're not painting the right picture of leadership. I think there is strong leadership in the Indigenous culture and that can be shared with this university (Interviewee #29).

There were comments about if reconciliation was happening in a university, it would be supporting and working with leaders in the Indigenous community. However, it is not about Indigenous people leading the RAPs:

We have a RAP and I believe that that's a way forward, so that's why I support that. But certainly I don't believe that I should be leading it or any other Aboriginal person should be leading it. It should be led by non-Aboriginal people (Interviewee #11).

Interviewee #21 bluntly stated, 'RAPs can make Indigenous staff incredibly busy and that's something that organisations really—we all—struggle with actually. Once you have a RAP you're dragged up—you drag up your Aboriginal staff to do everything'. However, there was a tension in that people expressed the desire and need for Indigenous leaders to be involved in shaping the Reconciliation, but not overburdened:

I thought it was important that it was a shared responsibility and again it's about that weaving, that you can't just have one without the other because there needs to be integrity in how things are done. There needs to be that expertise provided. I think that by having a shared leadership model as far as the senior executive and the directors, I see it like a shared leadership model, but they take their responsibility for the university's commitment and we take our responsibility for providing the expertise and the advice that ensures that what they do is going to be—meet the values of our communities and meet the expectations of our communities (Interviewee #23).

As already noted, RAPs can also be used as a tool. One senior Indigenous leader spoke of using the RAP to support and justify their community centred decisions:

I have to have that credibility and that respect and integrity to my own community and that will come first before the university. So it might be that the university says well we want this; if there's a conflict with what the community are saying, then I have to speak up and make that clear. I've had to do that on a couple of issues in this position. Since I've been here two and a

half years I've probably had to come down to the wire and had to put that in writing, that I can't accept this or I can't do that because it goes against the protocols of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal community. I must admit that when I have done that the VC has been very, very supportive and understanding and has supported me, because I've had to go straight to her about some of it. For this university, I find I did use our RAP in doing that and said to her you know, I've taken it and she's quite aware of the Action Plan and what we're trying to do (Interviewee #13).

### 5.3.3.2 *'Ticking the box'*

One of the unintended consequences of having a RAP is that it allows people to think that they have completed the requirements for Reconciliation because 'with our RAP we tick all the boxes' (Interviewee #28). Originally, RAPs had a set of three key broad principles – respect, relationships and opportunities – which needed to be addressed in the plan. However, since 2014, organisations need to use a more complex formula to help them shape and gain approval for their RAPs. Currently, RAPs must comply with the guidelines for one of the four different types of plans (e.g., Stretch RAP) as per the Reconciliation Australia website. This need for compliance to template requirements by Reconciliation Australia supports a 'tick box' mentality. Several interviewees referred to this. This need to 'tick boxes' to demonstrate that you have completed and complied with a particular RAP may have also inadvertently lead people to being superficial so they can get funding and appear to have 'achieved a state of reconciliation': 'Not just to do it to tick the box to get the funding, it needs to be some way in which it's monitored and measured okay ...and be serious about it. I don't know how you force institutions to do that rather than just tick the box' (Interviewee #11).

#### *Mandating outputs instead of valuing outcomes*

There is sometimes a different focus by Reconciliation Australia on measurable, quantifiable outputs versus the sometimes more aspirational outcomes. This fits well with university operational plans, which also contain short-term outputs versus long-term outcomes. This simplifies Reconciliation to equating to RAP targets and was particularly noted by the Reconciliation Australia staff, who referred to outputs, whereas several interviewees focused on larger, longer-term outcomes. As Charles O'Leary said about parity:

If you were to say what does that mean, how we measure reconciliation in the sense of the institution and the university, we talk about things in the sense of



parity and you're probably hearing this a lot in the sense of ongoing enrolment numbers and research output and all these other measures that we've got (Interviewee #6).

There are multiple references to the importance of positive outcomes being promoted by a RAP, including health and education outcomes. For example, 'If we define reconciliation as the relationships that we build between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in meeting positive outcomes for our communities and in relation to higher education' (Interviewee #24). It was the notion of the RAP existed as a plan that was seemingly mandatory, and that this then acted as a positive change agent:

But the reality is, it's really, really, really hard to quickly and easily change people's attitudes. We just have to start changing people's behaviours and people's attitudes will follow. I think that's what we've done with our RAP here. You just change behaviours by saying actually, you have to do it. It's fascinating because coming back to our RAP again, as people just have to do things, they become more engaged. They might grudgingly come to the party in the beginning. They come more engaged. They come more knowledgeable. They engage with the debate. They engage with the people (Interviewee #24).

The key cautionary advice from a Reconciliation Elder was to remember what was central to a RAP and not get caught up in the box ticking and performance as 'that's why you get the structure of RAPs that you start with respect and relationship before you move to achievement' (Interviewee #17).

#### **5.3.3.3     *Summary—renaming key themes***

The key findings in terms of dominant themes about RAPs were that they:

- could be used to capture everything related to First Peoples;
- could be symbolic as opposed to substantive;
- could be tools to challenge racism;
- could be prompts for employment opportunities for First Peoples;
- were most importantly about increasing employment opportunities for First Peoples;
- are also about compliance and outputs;
- could be burdensome in creating extra work for First Nations;
- be seen as one of several equity plans or issues;
- are not essential for reconciliation in the future
- useful for articulating how to 'do' Reconciliation

All this sat inside ideas of types of reconciliation evident in a university and were defined as:

- right relationships
- including deep listening
- an always evolving, dynamic process
- a slowly built relationship
- Indigenous rights at one extreme and basic equity at the other
- ‘ticking a RAP box’ for some meant they had done reconciliation
- Being about justice rather than only social justice

There were also findings that were relevant to both Reconciliation *and* RAPs saying they are about valuing Indigenous Knowledges; respecting Indigenous leadership and; the need for courageous leadership.

### **5.3.4 The future of reconciliation in Australian universities**

#### **5.3.4.1 *The connection between RAPs and reconciliation for the future***

From the very first interviewee, I heard that ‘reconciliation’ and ‘RAPs’ together in the same question did not necessarily fit for all people. When I asked about a RAP and its connection to reconciliation, I started getting answers that referred to reconciliation occurring *without* a RAP and was told that I must not assume that RAPs should be an essential aspect of reconciliation in universities.

Originally, my questioning had the preconceived idea that RAPs were an essential part of the formal university Reconciliation process. The reason why I approached potential interviewees was on the basis that they were connected to one of the university RAPs—although at the time of the interviews, it was not assumed that the participants were still involved with RAPs. Only one of the interviewees claimed to have no connection to a RAP, but this person made a substantial contribution to the conversation about the broader topic of reconciliation. The fact that I had chosen universities that were frontrunners in the formal reconciliation process through RAPs, meant that, as I was doing a policy ethnography, the RAP was used as the starting point. However, I was aware that it may not be an aspect of all the project institutions’ future stories. The latter, I had accommodated through the questions focussed on the future. Included here, are the main subjects that were raised about the future of RAPs and reconciliation.

### *RAPs as university core business – learning, teaching and research*

Chaney claimed that RAPs should reflect the core business of universities, which was explicitly confirmed by Ian Anderson. Both were clear that the core business of universities is education and described the success or failure of reconciliation in terms of the education and successful graduation of Aboriginal students. Anderson reiterated that RAPs must be connected to the core business of universities, which is teaching, learning and research:

Anything makes sense if it connects to the core business of the institution. A university has core business in terms of teaching and learning, research and Indigenous students. So the plan can only build outcomes if it actually drives change in relationship to those outcomes that will reflect its core business.

### *Supporting Indigenous research*

Comments about Indigenous research were made within the context of the RAP, although they were mostly about numbers of First Nations involved in research and :researching Indigenous Studies rather than Indigenous Research Methodologies :

I think the harder issue is research and what we do and we're having a discussion next month to discuss about how do we best support Indigenous research—some people talk about coordinating but I don't think that's the right word because Aboriginal economic policy research and genetic research and anthropology, they're all quite different (Interviewee #26).

Interviewee #24 referred specifically to an Indigenous research group that was 'bringing together Indigenous researchers from within the University, from outside the University and people who are working in this space, who are non-Indigenous. So we're trying to have conversations in lots of spaces around reconciliation.'

#### **5.3.4.2     *Reconciliation as an evolving, dynamic over-many-generations process***

The First Nations participants were especially strong in accepting and declaring that reconciliation was a slow, evolving process, and that this was both acceptable and preferable for such a living process: 'I think that idea is still evolving and it will, it will have to continue to evolve because... It has to even breathe like the rest of us' (Interviewee #18). Chaney as a non-Indigenous Reconciliation Elder, added the idea that over time and with continual practice, people will do it better: 'Any iterative process you learn by doing so if you do this

you say oh well, we need to do something additional here next time’. There was also a cautious optimism coupled with an acknowledgement of the challenges of ongoing racism:

Australia will mature as a nation if you can actually grapple with the issues of reconciliation and there’s every possibility that we may actually lead and develop – the challenges for the future are those who are left behind – those who politically have become disenfranchised and we see them in the political landscape being represented by the Pauline Hanson’s and that ilk (Interviewee #7).

Specific to teaching and learning environments in the future, there was a theme regarding ‘Indigenising’ the curriculum and the continuing, indefinite nature of this work as part of enacting reconciliation: ‘That’s an ongoing piece of work and I wouldn’t say it’s finished’ (Interviewee #24). However, the strongest theme, that even non-Indigenous participants, whom I would include as Reconciliation Elders noted, was the dynamic, changing, moment-in-time, generational aspect about reconciliation today, what it had been in the past, and what it could and what it should become in the future. All the First Nations, including those who had expressed scepticism for the RAP, expressed hope and belief in upcoming generations in terms of the realisation of reconciliation.

Although he had expressed disdain for the RAP and queried the concept of reconciliation having anything to do with First Nations—claiming that it was an issue for non-Indigenous people—one interviewee shared stories about the many instances in which he not only engaged with the academic community, but also very generously with the broader community to ‘do reconciliation’ that involved truth-telling:

Again also, it’s stepping outside the box to speak to non-Indigenous community and people. If you want to be all reconciled, the reality is they’ve got to hear the good, the bad and the ugly and be a part of the process and the discussions. I think that’s important. I speak at the most bizarre places and spaces at times. I speak at a lot of schools where there’s Indigenous kids, but also non-Indigenous kids. Whoever wants to invite me along, I’ll take them up and there you’ll be! (Interviewee #22).

The same interviewee referred to his weekend meeting with a non-Indigenous father and his child regarding a school project. This interviewee described the meeting as ‘an example of reconciliation, or people changing their mindset’. This interviewee was a respected academic and researcher and for me this story is an example of the patient magnanimity of many First

Nation leaders. This hopefulness and generosity towards the wider community was reflected by all the First Nations Reconciliation Elders in this project.

A final comment, from a Reconciliation Elder who after admitting their initial cynicism of formal reconciliation, conceded that the process had created spaces for dialogue and positive changes:

Reflecting back on those early discussions in the 1990s, what I think is extraordinary is how much activity and thinking has matured. Rolling forward to ... early in the week, I was having a conversation with a senior business leader who chairs the Indigenous Engagement Group for the Business Council of Australia and I just reflected: it would not have been possible for that individual to actually be so deeply engaged in the project of Indigenous development if he had not been for the reconciliation movement (Interviewee #7).

#### **5.3.4.3     *The integration of Indigenous knowledges into the university***

In arguing for embedding Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum into the future, one participant spoke of the need for all students to learn about First Peoples, as well as the university maintaining a focus on Indigenous education:

All our graduates, Indigenous, non-Indigenous, international, etcetera, have a role in the future of Australia as a just society. So in order to kind of move towards that, our programs have to recognise and acknowledge and bring students and create learning opportunities so our graduates are actually able to work effectively with Indigenous community as well as the direct contribution to educating Indigenous Australians (Interviewee #9).

Another First Nations participant referred to ‘Reconciliation being part of the DNA of that University’ and that it was ‘woven into the fabric of the University’ – that it was part of its ‘strong fabric’:

We embed some of this—the Indigenous agenda within the culture [of the university]. Do you know what I mean? Within the fabric of the institution. Again it’s—I don’t know, this might not make sense, but it’s that next evolution around with it, regardless around who is in the seat there; at what point does it actually get—...into the mesh and the fabric..(Interviewee #23).

Prof Peter Radoll’s explanation for reconciliation in relation to knowledges, was that it is about connections and partnerships with the nuances of Nakata’s intercultural, contested space. He further added that this contested space was a place where the two knowledge

systems are in competition, but he promoted this lively battle zone as a place for all, and within the context of this project, where everyone in the university *should* be:

I love using Martin Nakata's work where he talks about Western knowledges on the left and the Indigenous knowledges is on the right, or vice versa and in between he calls that the contested space. I love thinking—well you've got that contested space if you like—where there's Indigenous knowledges and non-Indigenous knowledges that are fighting out for this battle, if you like, for supremacy or recognition but that's the space that we need to be in for reconciliation to occur. So both of us have to jump into that space and really exciting things can happen. Indigenous knowledges for whatever reason is often considered a watered down or some sort of lesser Western knowledges but in fact it's actually not! RAPs won't ever address that sort of stuff, even though they might aspire to do some of that but they just don't. They can't because the academy decides on peer review and all that sort of stuff.

#### **5.3.4.4     *The need for maverick, courageous leadership***

During the time of this project, all the universities appeared to have similar goals and aspirations in their RAPs, with a few points of differentiation (see Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4). Chaney, in his invocation to the university sector for courageous leadership, spoke about Leon Davis, a maverick leader in the mining industry, who against much opposition from peers, led the transformation of how his company engaged with First Nations:

In 1995, Leon Davis really led the post-Mabo revolution and in a quite extraordinary way which transformed the cultural—well the legal approach—the whole approach of the mining industry. If he doesn't go to heaven I am going to be cross because it's a really important shift that's had massive impacts—the company now employs 1600 Aboriginal people. You've got hundreds of millions of dollars going into trust funds. It's an extraordinary, extraordinary thing that's been achieved.

A strong theme was that universities needed to do more. Michael Dodson made a call to the university leadership to do more than just raising flags:

That's something nice to do, a bit of signage, but don't just do that. I feel very easy with a university that, if I was going there to meet the PVC or the DVC in Indigenous Studies, the Indigenous Studies has to be in the VC's eyesight and if one of his executive has got that responsibility it can't but avoid his or her line of sight. I think it's justifiable because we're coming from so far back, we need to be—and I am not just talking about ANU, the whole 39 universities, how many there are, even the private ones—we've got to redouble our efforts. Because Indigenous Australia's coming from so far back, we're still disproportionately underrepresented in the academy.

When questioned about the future of the RAP, one Reconciliation Elder gave an answer much broader than the RAP. She pointed to the recognition and constitution debate occurring in the public domain and called on the universities to show leadership and make a response, and along with another Reconciliation Elder, called for the universities to collaborate:

I think they can do more. Universities are up there in terms of recognition and having a place in society but they can do more. There's pressure on the constitution. That could be something that the university can support Aboriginal people in and even have a statement in a RAP towards that. There's also—you know the high incarceration rates—these are issues that are continually out there in the media. The big positive would be that they [the universities] would come together as a group and look forward instead of competing against each other. (Interviewee #18)

#### **5.3.4.5     *A lone champion or a coalition of champions***

There were several allusions to 'champion/s' in terms of the RAPs. The word was stated several times by Tom Calma, and interestingly, one of his colleagues referred to Calma as such a champion. Calma claimed, 'It's led by and has to be led by, the personnel areas of an organisation, supported by Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people or a very senior level, you know, if you've got a champion.' Further, Calma asserted that without senior leadership, no action or change could happen: 'But the key thing is it has got to have the senior leadership. It has got to have—it's got to be a document that's owned by the organisation and the people of the organisation.' Others confirmed this position saying things like: 'Well, everybody should be doing something to lift it, that's what I've always maintained ... certainly the leadership and the drive has to come from the top' (Interviewee #28).

In my self-study I noted how individual champions, even those who were part of the senior executive of a university, struggled to get RAP targets addressed if these targets were not also explicit strategic plan KPIs, with visible corresponding support from the VC and others within the senior executive team. RAP targets usually require budget, and budget is controlled by individual members of a senior executive team. Unless these senior leaders also shared the same priorities as the RAP champion, and thus had related KPIs in their area plans, the commitment to delivering on the targets was not always there. Otherwise, as the targets were usually related to First Peoples in that university, the achievement of those targets became the responsibility of often one senior leader who had the Indigenous centre and any other related matters in their portfolio.

### **5.3.5 The future of RAPs in Australian universities**

#### **5.3.5.1 *RAP as an impetus for action and provocation***

Universities have hierarchical structures for their policies, procedures and plans, in which these documents are internally controlled and interconnected. While national or state legislation has precedence over any local institutional documents, some documents like the RAPs, are positioned outside the hierarchy of the documents that reflect university governance. The other plan that is perhaps most similar to the RAP in that its positioning, is the Disability, Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP), however, unlike the RAP, the DAIP has legislative reporting requirements (Government of Western Australia, Department of Communities, 2019).

An optimistic declaration was made by a non-Indigenous person who worked on the RAP in response to the question about the RAP having a future:

I think RAP has got the biggest opportunities that the government can ever think of because RAPs say we are all on board—because reconciliation is: you come from this direction and you [she indicates using her hands, starting apart and moving towards each other to touch]—we meet somehow in the middle line! (Interviewee #29).

These words indicated hopefulness and positivity about the place of RAPs in universities in the future and suggests the need for RAPs to give prominence to reconciliation-related topics, even if these include difficult conversations: ‘even if it’s something that you question, at least you can have a conversation about it then. You don’t like what’s being said then you ask why, why don’t you like it?’ (Interviewee #18). And another captured the essence of the importance of having something written down in such an environment, if you wanted people to be accountable in any way: ‘if you don’t have things written down that people have to adhere to, you can never look back and say that’s what we meant to do and that’s what we will do. We will be accountable because this will be measured!’ (Interviewee #14). Further, Calma as the Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia, commented early in his conversation with me that a main reason for having a RAP is that it ‘is really about the discipline’.

#### **5.3.5.2 *RAP as a public commitment and connector to other businesses***

Prof Ian Anderson, then PVC at Melb, like the DVCA at Curtin, Prof Jill Downie, both spoke about how powerful the RAP was because it was something that is not just in the university



sector but is instead a known framework that is used in corporations and businesses throughout the country. Thus, the RAP provides something that is easy for the universities to use to make connections with businesses, and because industry connectedness is a priority for all universities, the RAP program addresses this focus. Anderson spoke of it as something that was a symbol for the work that the University does in the Indigenous space. He was clear that it has to have outcomes but that was almost a given because of the corporate shaping of RAPs. For Melb, it was an integral part of their public facing engagement and something that everyone ‘out there’ can understand and link into:

In the short-term I guess I wouldn’t really like us to walk away from the RAP because I think it’s a statement. It’s a process to go through to develop. It’s something that is taken seriously by the University and reported on...’ ‘It’s quite an important and potentially powerful strategy and document because of that ability to work across organisations and not just within higher education but across sectors. So in the short-term I don’t think we’re mature enough to move away from that, personally, because I think it’s terribly important to still try and focus to get the job done.

Evidence from my self-study supported this participant’s view and I have also included an example of how this was highlighted at Curtin while I was the RAP Facilitator. A group of us at Curtin—Jeannie Morrison, Cheryl Stickels, Linda Lilly, Fred Chaney and I—organised a RAP Summit in 2013 (see Appendix F), which was attended by some of the larger businesses in Western Australia. Having a RAP meant that conversations could be held between the university and businesses at the same level.

#### **5.3.5.3     *RAP as a restriction or as an early stepping stone***

However, though these encapsulate positive sentiments as well as the idea that such plans are required, there were also unexpected comments indicating that RAPs may not have a future in all universities. This was one of the most interesting findings—that perhaps RAPs might not have a future in a university environment. Though the majority of the people interviewed supported the concept of a RAP, those who were many years experienced in university Reconciliation, raised questions as to whether a RAP is always the best way to plan, be accountable and ‘do’ reconciliation in a University. Words like, ‘I can see a future where they will become less and less important. We’re not there yet and we might be 10 years away from that, because people will be developing their Indigenous Strategy, not because they want to reconcile but because they understand that it’s so key to their business’(Interviewee #7). Of

the universities researched one of the four has done just that—decided not to renew their RAP but they have maintained evidence in their strategic plans, other published documents and website of a strong commitment to reconciliation.

One interviewee simply referenced the evidence of the Reconciliation Australia Reconciliation Barometers: ‘You could say you can perform great things without a RAP but statistically the evidence is that people who do have RAPs do better’ (Interviewee #17). And as another conceded, ‘We might not necessarily need a RAP; it [reconciliation] just might happen as you know. It’s a good start. It’s stepping stones. ... That’s how I see it. ... Yeah it will grow and develop into something stronger hopefully’ (Interviewee #18).

‘Having a RAP enables organisations to do that in a more constructive way, even though you don’t have to stick to the RAP. It might change as you evolve, but at least it gives you something to work towards’ (Interviewee #15). The RAP can thus be something for organisations who are early in the reconciliation journey. Finally from UoN (the university that decided not to renew their RAP): ‘Maybe it’s time for the next stage in our evolution, which may or may not involve a RAP. But I definitely think that it has been a valuable asset to us in the time that we’ve had it in the last five years achieved (Interviewee #23).

Responding to the question about why some universities choose not to have a RAP, Chaney gave as the best university example of an organisation demonstrating exemplary commitment to reconciliation without a RAP, the St Catherine’s model on the University of Western Australia’s campus, and though it’s not actually part of the university, they are formally connected to that university..

Another non-Indigenous Reconciliation Elder thinks there may be no RAPs in the future as RAPs may be considered tokenistic. For him the RAP is a way of gathering people and harnessing their energy to do something. It is in organising tool and for him, the idea of the next generation improving on how Reconciliation was expressed was also strong: ‘Yeah and that’s what I see as the future, the next generation are not—maybe not having to have RAPs; ‘it’s just accepted that we need to do something collectively about Indigenous disadvantage and for groups to do that’ (Interviewee #26).

#### **5.3.5.4     *Reconciliation without a RAP***

Sometimes, a RAP did not appear to work, or suit a university. As one participant reported after having been at a university that had a RAP, she was now at another university where there were issues with RA over the ‘last three years to try and get a RAP up’ (Interviewee #15). This led that university to create their own version of a reconciliation compact that aligned with the university’s strategic plan in its goals, actions and accountabilities.

As foregrounded by participants, UoN decided not to renew its RAP when the first RAP expired and chose to complement its reconciliation statement with a website entitled *Indigenous Collaboration*. This website shows evidence of the university’s commitment to, and integration of, reconciliation into university plans and activities. As one of the UoN participants stated in explaining why UoN did not need a RAP: ‘We’re so ahead of other institutions, I am not sure if that would be the most sensible way to move forward.’ Another interviewee, who had been involved in the creation of a RAP at her previous university, referred to how she had ‘raced it [RAP] along on a Western ecclesiastical calendar’, whereas now she was instead listening to the First Nation leaders at her current university and doing as they advised, and to date, they did not want a RAP. The other three universities in this project have new RAPs that build on their previous RAPs, and as determined by the requirements of Reconciliation Australia.

#### **5.3.5.5     *Ian Anderson and Fred Chaney on what should be in a university RAP***

The Hon. Fred Chaney outlined to me what should unequivocally be in a university RAP, but as an introduction, I repeat here what Prof Ian Anderson said which strongly endorses Chaney’s advice. Anderson confirms what Chaney also named as the most important aspect of a university RAP – that for Indigenous students, it must address the core elements of what to him defines a university – i.e. teaching, learning and research and that the RAP ‘can *only* build outcomes if it actually drives change in relationship to those outcomes that will reflect its core business’. Chaney, one of the original board members of Reconciliation Australia, outlines with more detail the four questions a university RAP must answer. He specified explicitly and similarly to Anderson, that a university RAP must be primarily about doing an excellent job educating Indigenous peoples as education is the principal work of a university:

It would be absurd if it wasn’t a significant part of it [RAP] to say, we’ve got to be bloody good at educating Aboriginal people in *all* of our faculties! We

want to show that we've got a track record in contributing to Aboriginal educational advancement. That's your [the university's] core business!

He named three further features of a university RAP: 'the second thing though is that there's this much bigger issue about reconciliation about community attitudes; attitudes broadly within the University'. The third statement he made regarded whether the universities were 'assisting the wider community to understand these issues and their importance.' This was a question about whether universities had the confidence to challenge and display leadership in the wider society. The fourth aspect of university RAPs was asking whether universities were places that 'collaborate with other universities and share the learnings'. He also added:

An unstated assumption of this conversation I am now adding that the whole notion of a RAP is that it is *not* developed unilaterally; that it's developed in consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders. If you're not doing that then it is just the latest Whitefella pronouncement!

Circling back to the original RAPs of the four universities, it is noted that three of these four areas were articulated in the documents. Examples have been selected from each of the RAPs in response to Chaney's points in the order in which he presented them: 'Increase in recruitment, retention and mentoring of Indigenous students in the CAS and in mainstream courses across the University' (Curtin). Similarly, with a focus instead of pathways, 'Continue to develop and build on primary and high school programs that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to provide a greater knowledge and awareness of pathways and University experiences' (UoN). The second issue regarding university culture was addressed by the RAPs as well: 'Engage with all staff to undertake Indigenous specific cross-cultural training in the area of employment and for academic staff in education' (ANU). Community engagement was somewhat addressed by actions such as: 'Extend university initiatives in the Goulburn Valley in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community partners: To improve secondary school retention. Build on outcomes of the Academy of Sports Health and Education' (Melb).

It was only Chaney's fourth call to universities, to collaborate with each other, that was not evident in these first RAPs. The current RAPs comment on collaboration with other organisations, but again, they do not mention collaboration with other universities. Though Holt told me that UoN staff had learned from talking with Curtin staff about Curtin's first RAP in shaping their own RAP, and had thus done what Chaney had suggested. Holt said

that, ‘it was following their (Curtin) lead that actually led to me looking at RAPs and the value of a RAP and then coming back and talking to our senior executive about how that would be valuable for UoN’.

#### **5.3.5.6     *Connecting back to the policy then and now***

Table 5.4 names some of the themes fundamental to explaining reconciliation as raised by the interviewees, but here I have returned to the RAP to see, often in contrast, how frequently and in what way they are mentioned in the document itself. The table provides a simple summary showing for example that ‘listening’, a concept that was highly valued by especially, but not exclusively, First Nations people interviewees when talking about reconciliation, is barely mentioned in the RAPs. ‘Relationships’, however, is clearly included several times and is central to what is written and portrayed in a RAP. (Note that an ‘X’ in the table indicates the theme is not explicitly named.)

**Table 5.4: Returning to the policy document**

Key themes raised by interviewees		Curtin RAP	ANU RAP	Melb RAP	UoN RAP	Summary comment
<b>Racism—anti-racism</b>	1st RAP	As a ‘vision’ for reconciliation—‘actively addresses racism within ourselves and our families, friends, workplaces and communities’	X	X	As part of their vision they are ‘committed to providing an environment that is free from racism and discrimination’	In their first RAPs, both Curtin and UoN made reference to challenging racism
	RAP 2019	As one of the dimensions of reconciliation as defined by Reconciliation Australia, it is named 4 times: in the narrative referring to ‘building positive Race Relations’	As part of the RAP vision statement: ‘The past two centuries of dispossession and racism have profoundly impacted all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life, including access to institutions like ANU’	Race Relations,	Refer twice to their commitment addressing racism	As ‘race relations’ are stated as part of the ‘Elevate’ RAP template both Curtin and Melb use the phrase.
<b>Relationships (number of mentions)</b>	1st RAP	4	6	4	7	Continues to be highlighted in all RAPs
	RAP 2019	6	10	11	N/A	
<b>Indigenous rights</b>	1st RAP	vision stating that it ‘supports the right of Indigenous Australians to express their cultures and participate on an equal footing in all aspects of Australian life’	X	X	X	UoN received Australia’s first World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium accreditation

	RAP 2019	Reference to 'Aboriginal rights' the UNDRIP and 'equity rights'	N/A	In reference to Native Title and UNDRIP		
<b>Indigenous knowledges (number of mentions)</b>	1st RAP	3	4	2	1	Everyone includes some reference
	RAP 2019	11	X	X	X—World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium accreditation noted on website	Brief references to Indigenous research methodologies and building cultural capability in courses implies some awareness of Indigenous knowledges in all the RAPs.
<b>Listening to First Peoples</b>	1st RAP	X	X	X	X	Consulting Elders from the community noted but otherwise reference to listening only mentioned once
	RAP 2019	X	1	X	X	
<b>Recognition of Elders</b>	1st RAP	Greater role promised in both research and teaching area	X	Role in reviewing RAP	Greater role promised in delivering guest lectures	
	RAP 2019	Academic position: Elder in Residence established in 2014  Chair of Indigenous Leadership Group and RAP committee	X	Now named 'Traditional Owners and Elders. Role in RAP governance. To help enact 'Place' theme (one of 4 themes)	N/A	Curtin's appears to have the only unique academic position. Melb reference Elders in their current RAP as 'Traditional Owners and Elders' and name them as having input into the review and shaping of the RAPs

### **5.4 Level 3: Capstone analysis**

A synthesis of the themes led to this capstone analysis. By taking the RAPs as a compass to direct this policy ethnography, my refractive reconciliatory reflections on the data, have elicited the following answers to questions regarding the place and shape of RAPs and reconciliation in Australian universities. First, Indigenous rights-based reconciliation is noted as the ideal form of Reconciliation, in which:

- Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous related matters are given prominence and a discrete place.
- First Nations continue to be given status as First Nations and be separated from areas focused on equity and diversity. This inevitably means that reconciliation work must also stand alone.
- First Nations are pivotal in the governance, content and processes related to teaching Indigenous knowledges, languages and Indigenous research methodologies and in directing their students.

Other key findings show that First Nations Reconciliation Elders believe that Reconciliation is evolving slowly and positively over generations, and that non-Indigenous people listening to Indigenous peoples is the key to building relationship, which is integral to this reconciliation.

In terms of the RAP, it can provide a useful written framework for guiding how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people engage with each other. However, RAPs are not essential for reconciliation to occur, and the RAP template is too restrictive for some universities. If a RAP existed, it was clearly a useful tool that First Nations could wield to make the university attend to First Nations matters. Even with a RAP, and its stated targets, these must also be embedded in university strategic plans and government and/or Universities Australia/NATSIHEC reporting requirements to ensure they are addressed. Finally, a coalition of executive university leaders that includes the VC, need to lead reconciliation, and if it exists, also the RAP.



## **5.5 Summary—key points**

Situated from an interpretivist reconciliation paradigm and informed by grounded theory strategies, I undertook a policy ethnography of four university RAPs. The responses were confined to the RAPs, the 29 interviewee, and self-study responses (see Chapter 4). The interviewees were connected to at least one of the RAPs in these universities and many of them had decades of experience working in reconciliation both in universities and in the broader Australian community. The key conclusions were that the RAPs were helpful, but not essential plans for universities to use to explore and enact reconciliation. The main reason for their limitations was that they were owned and controlled by a corporation that was outside the university sector. It is how what was written in the plans was enacted and where the RAPs were positioned in relation to First Nations that were key markers of reconciliation in universities. First Nations staff in universities continue to desire rights-based reconciliation, which means that they continue to seek to be given status as First Nations and be acknowledged separately from areas focused on equity and diversity. This in turn requires reconciliation related work to also be situated separately from such areas.

## **6. Analysis of the findings**

Reconciliation? I've always said it's an ongoing process. It's about establishing ground rules from generation to generation, the ground rules of the relationship between the First Peoples and those who've come since. What we set down as one generation may not suit the next generation so they continue the process of reconciliation to suit them and so on and so on and so on. I am loathe to compare it to marriage, but any partnership you have to work at and they're about relationships and relationships require maintenance. It requires a lot of things. (Michael Dodson)

I would probably distil it [Reconciliation] into that we have mutual responsibility for each other, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. We've arrived at a point where we care about each other enough to be responsible for our relationship with each other. (Cheryl Stickels)

### **6.1 Introducing the analysis**

This chapter consists of an analysis of the crucial themes from findings and outcomes of the previous two chapters—all grounded in the RAP policy ethnography. My refractive reflections on these findings led me to analyse, with input from research literature, the implications for RAPs and reconciliation into the future. The research design and overall methodological approach were shaped by the interviews of 30 individuals, including me as part of a self-study, which were instigated by the initial analysis of the RAPs. The RAPs provided the pathway that shaped this policy ethnography.

This chapter includes answers to questions about the purposes, places and states of the RAPs, along with their benefits and costs to the universities. The findings regarding the various expressions of Reconciliation and the forms and processes suggested for the future are also shared. Several theories that are helpful in conducting an analysis of this phenomenon are shared, which led to the suggestion of a new synergistic theory specific to reconciliation in universities. This analysis was conducted with the data from the RAPs, the words spoken by the interviewees and from my self-study.

#### **6.1.1 Restating the research question**

The overall aim of this research was to examine the idea of reconciliation in Australian universities and consider how it had been articulated and executed by universities that were early adopters of RAPs. A policy ethnography was used to explore the life of four university

RAPs to assess ‘how the policy is lived on the ground, its ethnographic presence in the communities it is intended to serve’ (Ma Rhea, 2012, p. 63). Grounded theory techniques were used to help shape the analysis of the data. I listened to what the data revealed about the state of the universities’ reconciliation spaces and here note insights into university education and leadership for the future and add further information to the Australian reconciliation story.

At the onset of the research project, I used the explanation from Reconciliation Australia to inform my work:

Reconciliation is about building better relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for the benefit of all Australians. To create positive change we need more people talking about the issues and coming up with innovative ideas and actions that make a difference (Reconciliation Australia, 2016).

The interview questions that unpacked the key research question, were also informed by the three concepts—relationships, respect and opportunities—that Reconciliation Australia used to explain reconciliation. These also became known as the ‘pillars’ of RA’s RAPs, the plans that were ‘about working with organisations across Australia to turn their good intentions into real actions (Reconciliation Australia, 2016). And as Chaney cautioned me when he referred to the writer, Don Watson, ‘we made the mistake which is common in political offices, we mistook a good intention for doing something. It is that *translation* of the intention into doing something that is essential’. Indeed, it is the ‘doing’ of reconciliation, through the RAP and within a university that this project has explored.

## **6.2 The state of RAPs and reconciliation**

### **6.2.1 The national context**

During 2016–2017, I was gathering the data at a time in Australian history when the ‘constitutional recognition campaign’ debate was ferociously roaring in the media background and at other times there was silence. Two of the universities had openly and strongly supported the campaign. The local Western Australian context also meant that for one of the universities in Western Australia, conversations regarding reconciliation became connected to the historic event of the South-West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council and the West Australian state government agreement on Noongar Native Title land claims. State

parliaments had changed their constitutions to recognise the First Peoples in 2016 (Nelson, 2018, p. 9) but then the Australian federal government's rejection of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* happened in 2017, which set a more pessimistic tone at the national level. Along with earlier historical events, such as between 2000–2007, several million dollars of the Indigenous budget being used as substitute funding for programs to benefit *all* Australians, including Reconciliation Australia (Moreton-Robinson, 2009, p. 73), rather than being used directly for First Nations, indicated that there were still assimilationist problems. The Reconciliation Australia 'Reconciliation Barometer Report' also noted that over the past decade 'there has been a drop in the political salience of Indigenous issues compared to other concerns' (Nelson, 2018, p. 9). The other findings that supported the final recommendations of my research are that trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous people remain low (Nelson, 2018, p. 32), with the lowest measured in Western Australia, where Curtin is located. Since the last similar report in 2014, there has been no change in what respondents think about organisations needing to do more in the areas of education. 52 per cent of respondents believed that more needed to be done and the other 48 per cent believed that enough or even less should be done (Nelson, 2018, p. 67). Another hopeful finding was the response to wanting to do something to improve reconciliation, in which 54 per cent of non-Indigenous people and 73 per cent of First Peoples responded positively (Nelson, 2018, p. 89).

### **6.2.2 The broader education context**

My findings support and extend the theoretical work undertaken by Burrridge (2006, p. 68) in her account of reconciliation within the Australian school context. Burrridge cited Buckskin (2001): 'there is a strong belief among Australian educators that reconciliation begins in our schools and that achieving educational equality for Indigenous children is central to the process of reconciliation' (p. 6). The RAPs indicate education of Indigenous students as a priority in various aspirational targets about increasing numbers, such as exceeding 'the 3.15 per cent proportion of Indigenous representation' (Curtin RAP 2008-2013). What the data have demonstrated is that in terms of retention and success for Indigenous students, there is some progress in attaining this. Also, supporting and developing a place for Indigenous knowledges remains extremely patchy.

As summarised by one interviewee, who was a member of a university senior executive:

I think the way you described a small ‘r’ reconciliation and non-Indigenous and Indigenous people working together is in the long-term a key to moving way forward. The university is listening to our Indigenous students, our Indigenous colleagues and our Indigenous community about what they think. I think there’s an onus on universities to lead the way. That’s another part of that, not to be playing catch up. But we’re [universities] certainly not leading the way in terms of proportions. But there are some success stories in some universities and some areas (Interviewee #26).

### **6.2.3 Reconciliation within universities**

In 2011, universities were encouraged to ‘create either reconciliation statements and/or RAPs to reflect the university’s Indigenous education strategy and commitment to meaningful engagement with local Indigenous communities and organisations’ (Universities Australia & IHEAC, 2011b, p. 24). As noted in the key Australian documents of 2011-2012, this was followed up in with the Behrendt Review (Behrendt et al., 2012), which encouraged reconciliation within universities and gave guarded support for RAPs because the authors noted that RAPs appeared to be ‘primarily the responsibility of the Indigenous Education units rather than truly strategic whole of university documents they are intended to be (p. 148)’. They cited the report by Moreton-Robinson et al (2011) and Pechenkina and Anderson’s (2011) background paper to support their recommendations, and went on to advise universities who wanted to have a RAP about how this should be done, including saying that RAPs ‘be incorporated into annual business planning cycle outcomes’ (Behrendt et al., 2012, pp. 148).

The next significant national paper relevant to Indigenous tertiary education in 2017, was also cautious about RAPs saying: ‘While universities have specific Indigenous strategies or Reconciliation Action Plans, these should serve as complementary to, not a replacement for, central policy documents’ (Universities Australia, 2017, p. 18). The Buckskin et al. (2018) report echoed these cautions and instructed universities that if they chose a RAP, it must be led in partnership with First peoples:

Choose to engage with external bodies, such as Reconciliation Australia, through the development of a RAP to show their commitment in a public forum and add another level of accountability. Importantly, if this path is chosen it must be driven by the senior executive of the university in collaboration with senior Aboriginal roles in the true sense of reconciliation (p. 83).

These were all strong messages to make Indigenous education part of *core* university business and that this should not be determined by an outside body, which perhaps explains the reluctance of most universities to developing a RAP (e.g., UoN). Although the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report (Universities Australia, 2019) included self-reporting by the universities that could be more ‘rosy coloured’ than the findings of my project or the Buckskin et al. (2018) report, the actual existence of the strategy and the apparent growing strength of the Universities Australia partnership with NATSIHEC, were signs of positive change for the future. Universities Australia (2019) acknowledged that even before their Indigenous strategy had been created, many universities had a long ‘commitment to reconciliation’ (p. 81).

Enacting reconciliation within universities clearly involves not just questioning the hegemony of Western knowledges in the institution, but also disrupting it and asking for other ways of being and knowing. Reconciliation raises the question as to whether universities really can be innovative, engage with ‘other’ ways of knowing and lead students in learning for tomorrow. Like Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008), I too found it ‘pedagogically tragic that various Indigenous knowledges of how action affects reality in particular locales have been dismissed from academic curricula’ (p. 136). The findings of my research do not suggest that reconciliation means Indigenous knowledges usurp what we currently have, but they clearly demonstrate, particularly through the words of our Reconciliation Elders, that universities must enact the precepts of the UNDRIP and make way for the knowledges of this country’s First Peoples. This includes evidence of integrating these knowledges into the curriculum as well as reshaping university governance, learning On-Country and promoting Indigenous research methodologies. Therefore, the idea promoted so strongly by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b) about ‘truth-telling’—the theme chosen by Reconciliation Australia for the 2019 National Reconciliation Week (Reconciliation Australia., 2019b)—can be easily actualised in universities that are innovative enough to explore different ways of being and knowing—of ‘katajininy warniny’. This form of reconciliation does not mean being apologetic for Western knowledges, but instead being confident enough to stop using the label ‘mainstream’ and ‘other’. Australian universities must go forth with courage and make changes.

### **6.2.3.1     *The project universities***

As outlined in the previous two chapters, the explanations for reconciliation span from the almost dismissive concept of it being ‘just a word’ (Interviewee #23) to an idea that had been ‘kidnapped away’ (Interviewee #22), which alluded especially to the time when Australia was being led by John Howard. The definition could also be about ‘assisting the people that have been discriminated against to move together in a way in which we can support them but which is guided by them... the need for respectful change’ (Interviewee #14). In whatever way it was presented, both in the words of the RAPs and by the interviewees, reconciliation always came across as having some moral value (Allen, 1999, p. 325). As Brounéus (2003, p. 57) recommended, each country needs to find its own way to define and enact reconciliation because what may work in place, will not have meaning in another. This research offered some insights into how reconciliation in the universities in one country, was shaped and enacted.

## **6.3 Rationalising RAPs for universities**

RAPs have the potential to be used for transforming the position of First Nations in the university system. They can be about equality and justice and reflect Indigenous rights, and at the other extreme, as the data have shown, RAPs have the potential to encourage assimilation and constrict how universities express reconciliation.

### **6.3.1     The opportunities of RAPs**

#### **6.3.1.1     *Promoting employment***

Participants discussed how utilitarian RAPs could be, not necessarily the specificities of the plans but rather the fact that the plans existed at their universities. First Nations interviewees spoke about the opportunities for employment prompted by RAPs as being their best aspect. However, evidence of other more influential documents in a university, indicated that the RAPs were not essential for creating employment opportunities. As Larkin (2013) noted in his research, the intent of RAPs are commendable in terms of offering opportunities but ‘it is the employment strategies of the organisations that holds them to account’ (p. 147). These strategies have KPIs that senior staff are accountable for and as all the universities have an Indigenous employment strategy independent of their RAPs and all have governance structures that afford Indigenous people a voice in at least an advisory role to the VC.

However, as a senior university leader, Larkin (2013) also made the affirming statement, that the RAP at his university (Charles Darwin University) was part of the ‘Indigenous strategies and practices to achieve a more equitable and accessible higher education system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ (p. 242).

Even if RAPs have this positive role, it was the publicly available annual Indigenous Education Statements—and then the Indigenous Student Success Program Performance Reports from 2017—that universities were obligated to produce and publish annually that were more powerful. These reports ensured ongoing government funding and it is these documents that capture most of the opportunities, which were then reflected in the RAPs. Universities are also required to have Indigenous employment strategies, which cover such strategies as participation and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the employment strategy for the university and even require an indication of how the university is demonstrating increased participation by First Nations people in decision-making processes. These statements are reporting requirements to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in the Australian Government (Australian Government: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

Even with these documents and requirements, the fact that improving employment opportunities for First Nations people was seen as the primary benefit of the RAP, cannot be overstated: ‘Employment plans, teaching and learning plans, yep, recruitment plans. So yeah, it was informed—it was definitely a key document that showed the commitment—what the university agreed to as a commitment to the university’ (Interviewee #23). Michael Dodson also commended the RAP program as creating transformational changes in the ways in which businesses now behave, including universities. He noted that it was normal to have a RAP as part of the CSR agenda, with the result of more employment opportunities for First Nations:

When you look at today and the way in which big organisations and corporations now almost feel duty bound to have RAPs—some are better than others—but at least they feel obliged to do it. That’s a huge change! It’s a huge change. It’s certainly turned around thinking and it’s a change for the better on all counts, but particularly for Indigenous people who need to be in work.



### **6.3.1.2     *A tool to facilitate positive change***

There was a strong theme addressed by the First Nations participants regarding how they could use RAPs as ‘a powerful tool’ (Interviewee # 7), ‘a very important device within this university’ (Interviewee #22) to get Indigenous matters addressed. However, they acknowledged that ‘a RAP is never going to be a silver bullet to solve everything. It is a workplace tool that can help within workplaces’ (Interviewee #3). One participant who had initially stated that reconciliation was problematic and that the RAP was not always the answer, was clear that she found the RAP to be strategically useful for getting attention paid to First Peoples and their matters in the university:

We constantly use the RAP—as I do—I will pull it out and I use it where I need to use it. So it’s about employment, it’s about culture, our culture and the way we do things, the way we work in the centre, because we are owned by the university and many of my staff think we can do what we want, but we can’t. But for me it’s about again crossing the two, going into one world and crossing over. And if there’s something that I really need to bring up and say that this is totally inappropriate and it’s not the way that we work, I will use the RAP to also bring about trying to get change; trying to support what I want to do culturally. I find that that’s a good thing with the RAP. It doesn’t always work, but there are times—and I use the RAP quite often and bring people’s attention to the RAP: this is what the RAP says! (Interviewee #13).

### **6.3.1.3     *An enabler of Indigenous rights***

The concept of equality aligns with the concept of Indigenous rights (Ma Rhea, 2014). If a RAP has this focus, it would support what Reconciliation Elders like Dodson argued, that ‘a RAP should give prominence and place to First Nations’. Indigenous rights were barely mentioned in the RAP documents (see Table 5.4), but the words spoken by most of the interviewees indicated those who worked in reconciliation understood and promoted Indigenous rights. Dodson’s words encapsulated the key themes of translating reconciliation within RAPs that advocate for rights. When it comes to rights, it is not the words written in the RAP documents that appeared to matter to the interviewees, but the fact that the RAPs existed as artefacts. Here, Dodson defined what RAPs represent in terms of rights by referring to the position that universities take regarding equality and inclusivity, as well as the need to give prominence to First Nations separately:

I think it’s [the RAP] central to the ‘we’ I mentioned earlier, because it should never be seen as ‘Oh, we’re doing something for ‘the Blacks’!’ We’re doing

something for other Australians who we've ostracised and isolated and marginalised and dispossessed. We need to treat them like we want to be treated ourselves and to treat them like all Australians ought to be treated, fairly and justly and we understand their special position in the country. They were here first, we came and took it off them; this is one way of trying to make amends.

### **6.3.2 The restrictions of RAPs**

One of the bureaucratic limitations of RAPs is that they are usually created to articulate reconciliation for a two- to four-year period, with the opportunity to revise slightly each year. For some, the more explicit and definitive people were in naming the actions and the targets in their RAP, the more constrained they were about reflecting and revising their RAP-related activities. Reconciliation Australia, in their attempt to encourage measurable outputs for which people can write reports to be submitted to them, edited and advised universities on their proposed RAPs until they met their requirements. Several interviewees referred to being frustrated by how prescriptive and constraining this process could be.

#### **6.3.2.1 *The outside plan***

This need to rethink and reshape how reconciliation is actualised was evidenced by the current four RAP templates, which determine levels for RAPs. As the data have shown, a process created for an organisation that is a business will not always suit an organisation whose primary focus is education and knowledge creation. However, just like a business, if something is not named and measured in a university's strategic plan and does not have associated explicit KPIs assigned to an executive leader, then it is unlikely to happen. There is tension between using RAPs to exhibit a desire to be doing something right with First Nations people and the lack of consequences when organisations do not deliver on their targets. As the RAPs belong to an outside body that does not have regulatory legislative authority, unless identical KPIs are in organisations' strategic plans, there are no consequences for not meeting the targets named in RAPs. As Larkin (2013) argued, 'even then, such organisation plans are noted as being only part of the solution as 'these targeted strategic plans, policy frameworks and performance-based programs to achieve Indigenous outcomes' (p. 228).

RAPs sit outside university strategic plans, although they can be linked to them, and can fail to have legitimacy and acknowledgment by everyone in the leadership team. This is another

indication of the limitations of the requirements and templates offered by Reconciliation Australia. However, as an educational resource and as a place for guidance for universities that are starting to engage in formal and public reconciliation, they have much to offer:

If it takes a RAP to actually be able to have the conversations internally and externally to the university, then to me, that's what should happen. I think the RAP is about conversations, providing a framework to have some dialogue and discussion. So I think for those universities that are having trouble actually getting off the starting blocks, or have tripped over on the first hurdle or the second hurdle and have got their scraped knees and not really being able to heal and keep going, then maybe a RAP would be a good tool to actually help them in having the conversations (Interviewee #23).

However, for a university that has a mature, established relationship among Australia's First Nations and all others, the current trademarked RAP can sometimes be restrictive: 'I think it depends on where the university is at. I don't believe that there's a one size fits all for every university. I think that we'd be silly to think that was the case (Interviewee #23). As of 1 March 2019, three of the four project universities had renewed their RAPs. Curtin and Melb have the highest level RAP, the Elevate RAP and ANU has chosen the third level, the Innovate RAP. UoN had instead decided to leave the RAP program, while still remaining strongly committed to reconciliation.

#### **6.3.2.2     *The university as business vs. the university as educator***

Reconciliation Australia surveys that sought to measure the impact of the RAP program have indicated that it has been successful in changing attitudes and the fact that they had started with eight organisations having a RAP in 2006, to 650 organisations with RAPs by 2016 and a further 500 organisations in the process of developing a RAP (Reconciliation Australia, 2016). Although the RAP program appears to be thriving across many organisations, as already noted elsewhere (see Chapter 1), because only one quarter of Australian universities have a RAP, it is evident that for many in the sector, having a RAP continues to be tricky.

Although RAPs can be viewed as vital to university business because it gives them a connection and common attribute with other businesses who have RAPs (see Appendix F), it was noteworthy that the Reconciliation Australia participants did not compare the university sector with to school sector, in which Reconciliation Australia has an extensive RAP program. Instead of being considered part of the education sector, RA staff referred to the universities as being part of the business sector and noted that 'the university market has been

a bit trying for us to actually progress universities to have a RAP'. The concept of the university sector as a market or a marketplace and a business was referred to many times by the participants. Also, the positioning of a RAP as a marketing tool was apparent. As was said to me by staff from Reconciliation Australia, 'a university is a business' and they referenced RAP activity:

There would be a whole range of things that, in a corporate sense, a university would do and would do as a matter of course in the general conduct of its business'. 'It's going to the future we'd love to be able to convert those [universities] to RAPs. They were saying they're a corporate commercial entity. They're a work place. We'd certainly love to get them on board (Reconciliation Australia Interviewee).

Using RAPs, given the current controls by Reconciliation Australia, can sometimes clash with what it means to actually *be* in the reconciliation space within universities. RAPs were created to 'make real' reconciliation in a commercial world. However, universities have more ways of being in the world other than as businesses and as noted by one participant, 'RAP conditions are just too confining for what we need' (Interviewee #15). A RAP may therefore be useful for enacting reconciliation for some universities, but as the majority of Australian universities have shown by their lack of engagement, it is not the only way.

#### **6.3.2.3     *Situating the RAP based on equity pragmatics***

One problematic issue can be the place where RAP work is managed from within universities. While it was fine that such work was situated in the building that was the university's Indigenous centre, if this meant the RAP work was then done by Indigenous peoples, then the participants of this research project argued this implied that reconciliation was the responsibility of the First Peoples, which is simply wrong. Several participants noted that positioning the RAP so that it implied, and often became, extra work for First Nations was wrong. Calma noted this was a mistake made when RAPs were first introduced in Australia, but he believed this was no longer done in most organisations

It started off early in the days but it's just changing a lot now. Organisations thought—government departments were champions at this—that it's a RAP so we'll get the Aboriginal people in the organisations to develop it up. That was defeating the whole intent of it. So it's now moved fortunately, in most organisations: that the organisation takes responsibility and is supported by Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people in that whole process. (Calma)

Explicit work related to RAPs and reconciliation could be also led from the equity and diversity offices of the universities. The report by Moreton-Robinson et al. (2011) indicated that universities should avoid placing any work that is associated with First Nations in such places and instead endorse the UNDRIP. In doing this, they are challenged to be unequivocal about giving First Nations people their places and voices completely separate to any work being done in such offices:

Predictably, Indigenous higher education provision is often yoked to equity and diversity plans. Indigenous Australians are corralled with other low SES groups without regard to First Peoples status as defined in the UNDRIP and recognised in most universities' Reconciliation Statements (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2011, p. 51).

This relegation of reconciliation activities and RAPs to diversity and equity offices in universities diminished the Indigenous rights of the First Nations within those universities. It relegated the conversation and the activities to a smaller place to be one of many other social justice 'issues'. Although my project focused on how this reconciliation played out within university settings, a similar finding regarding reconciliation in the broader Australian landscape was comprehensively covered by Short (2008, pp. 165–168), who argued that the narrow focus on social justice ignored larger, more significant matters from land rights to self-determination. Gunstone (2007, 2008) also argued that the reconciliation process, including the focus on educating the populace, had been stymied by several factors, including the focus on 'the nationalist discourse of reconciliation' (Gunstone, 2008, p. 175).

Certainly, the sentiments expressed by some participants in this project echoed declarations made in the first years of Reconciliation Australia and the formal reconciliation process in Australia by First Nations writer, Moran (2003), who viewed the process as 'a government-funded attempt at creating a unified Australian national category from the settler/Indigene opposition, whilst leaving intact the fundamental colonial structures and lingering colonial fantasies shaped by this opposition and its implied hierarchy' (p. 189). That this critique could also be made of the hierarchical structure of the Australian university system is reflected in some of the outcomes of this project. However, there was also evidence of the hope and potential of what reconciliation could be, which is at the forefront of the findings in this project and is supported by work already done within education environments by the many scholars cited in this project. Along with Langton (2001, p. 13, as cited in Hattam & Matthews, 2012), I believe that Reconciliation is about 'constructing an honourable place for

Indigenous Australians in the modern nation state’ (p. 12). This was carefully explained to me by Interviewee #11:

I mean to be reconciled you need to have been somehow connected in the first place, where that hasn’t happened. To me that was all just semantics and the whole idea was about Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people working together and in particular the non-Aboriginal people taking responsibility for—in negotiating and working with Aboriginal people—in negotiating what needs to be done and how non-Aboriginal organisations and people could help and assist and work with Aboriginal people to achieve the sort of aims that we were looking at.

The following directive, which confirmed the nature of this place that I also contain in the SWIT (see Figure 6.2), is taken from the *Strengthening Evaluation in Indigenous Higher Education Contexts in Australia* (Smith et al., 2018), which referenced the UNDRIP and the Coolangatta Statement in acknowledging the unique rights of First Peoples in relation to education, and thus to resourcing. They note that this resourcing must be ‘*separate to those associated with equity funding*’ (p. 67). Placing RAPs in university equity offices is an unwitting assimilationist decision, which abets the relegation of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges to the ‘equity bucket’ (Interviewee # 22) and thus must be avoided.

## **6.4 Reconciliation revealed on a continuum**

Reconciliation that is dynamic and evolving, expressed in a spiralling overlapping continuum, but always based on right relationship and centred in the land and waters of the ‘The Great South Land’. These expressions of our universities’ reconciliation are captured in Figure 6.1.

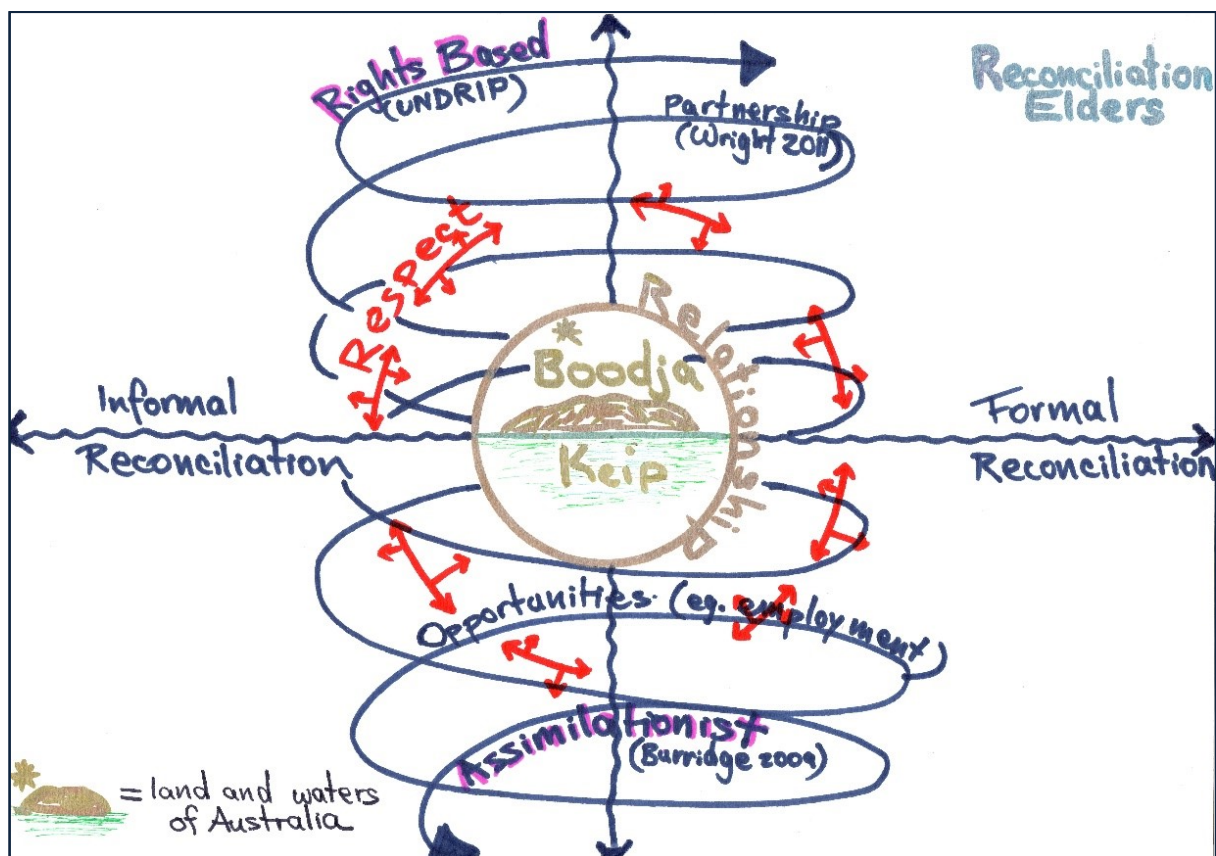


Figure 6.1: The Reconciliation Spiralling Continuum (RSC)

#### 6.4.1 A dynamic, evolving process

The policy ethnography may have commenced with the RAPs, which were the key expression of formal Reconciliation in universities, but the concept of Reconciliation is larger than the RAPs. How reconciliation in Australia's universities was revealed in the data can be explained using the RSC (see Figure 6.1), which starts with Country–'boodja'–as the heart or centre. Boodja is encircled by the 'relationship' that is integral to the definition of reconciliation, followed by 'respect'. As explained by Holt, 'respect is a value of the university from a Western perspective, but when we talk about respect we talk about respecting our Nguraki or our wise people and our Elders'. Also, these two words (along with the pragmatic outcome related word 'opportunities') capture the essence of the basis of the original RAPs.

The ways in which the concept of reconciliation are expressed are complex and understood differently by those who work in universities that have RAPs. At one end, it can have messy overtones of a system that conspires to be unintentionally racist in its fear of conversations

regarding sovereignty and its assimilationist structures, whereas at the other extreme, it can have individuals who are inclusive, creative and work together to engender First Nations knowledges to be at the fore. The vertical arm of the RSC is based on Burrridge's (2009, p. 116) reconciliation typologies, which named versions of reconciliation as being somewhere between the rights-based approach at one end and the assimilationist version at the other extreme, with symbolic reconciliation in the middle. This is reflected in the project RAPs, which referred to flag raising and symbolic gestures. These were also referred to by interviewees as having a place as part of the expression of reconciliation:

I think that the further it takes you into a kind of a deep look at what are the institutional barriers to change, the more that the issues like racism, anti-racism need to come to the fore. But if the RAP is really a fairly superficial and symbolic agenda—like flagpole raising, NAIDOC Week, that sort of stuff—it's not going to take you to that point. (Interviewee #7)

RAPs were integral to the expression of reconciliation, so the Reconciliation Elders and most of the other interviewees in this project would perhaps resonate with Burrridge (2009, p. 118), who had argued a decade earlier that 'mainstream Australia must ask the question, is reconciliation to be merely symbolic expression of nationhood or are there more complex realities we must face as a nation before we are truly reconciled?' Burrridge's (2009) 'Reconciliation Typologies' have been helpful in the analysis of my findings. The RSC sits within an axis with quadrants that provide a backdrop and reflects the more nuanced versions of reconciliation within universities as evidenced in the data. The key findings regarding this reconciliation are analysed in the next sections.

#### **6.4.2 The wisdom of Reconciliation Elders**

Many of the people I encountered in this project displayed distinctive reconciliation wisdom that should be listened to so as to transform how universities move into the future. I labelled older First Nations people whom I interviewed within the universities as 'Reconciliation Elders'. I also gave this title to some of the non-Indigenous participants who displayed evidence of understanding 'Boodja Neh', had worked for many decades beside First Nations colleagues, and over many decades and who knew 'we have to listen [to First Nations in our university] and we will have to implement' (Interviewee #20). Such people maintained contact, had ongoing relationships and engaged with First Peoples and their lands and waters as well as displaying discernible humility during their interviews. These leadership traits



resonated with the findings of Wright, Lin and O’Connell’s Looking Forward Project (2016), who named humility, inquisitiveness and openness as key attributes for meaningful engagement for non-Indigenous people working with local First Peoples.

#### ***6.4.2.1 Community connections and working with Elders***

A further explanation from the Looking Forward Project relevant to the RAPs is about now the university engages with First Nation communities. All the RAPs included statements about consulting or working with First Nation communities and the most pertinent research literature on the pragmatics of how to work and consult with First Nations community. Wright, Lin and O’Connell’s project (2016) was completed with organisations that work in mental health and alcohol support services, but it provides principles and a pragmatic framework, which can be applied in other contexts. It was created by a senior First Nations academic to ‘initiate systems change by bringing service providers together with Nyoongar Elders to explore new ways of working that privileges a Nyoongar worldview and begins to decolonise existing practices (Wright, Lin & O’Connell, 2016, p. 85)’ in how they provide their services. One part of the framework is the ‘Debakarn Koorliny Wangkiny’ (Steady Walking and Talking), which describes how an organisation and Elders should work together (Wright et al, 2015). The value of the literature on this framework is that it informs how researchers and participants work together when using the proposed new hybrid self-study research method (see Chapters 3 and 7).

#### **6.4.3 Indigenous rights-based reconciliation**

Although a link to Indigenous rights from the RAP documents is tenuous (see Table 5.), the interviewees spoke of this as the *ideal* concept for shaping reconciliation. This idea can be linked to the UNDRIP, namely Article 14, which advises that First Nations explicitly lead and shape their education: ‘Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning’. Such leadership in Australia is held by NATSIHEC, who partner with Universities Australia to give direction about Indigenous higher education. As the peak authority for Indigenous Education, their advice and direction needs to be sought and adhered to by all universities.

Michael Dodson (quoted in Maddison, 2009, p. ix) referred to his brother, Patrick Dodson, saying that unless it was rights-based reconciliation, it could not be considered reconciliation: ‘For the vast majority of Indigenous people and a significant number of Settler Australians, the substantial recognition of Indigenous peoples inclusion as a distinct and unique people is a fundamental condition for a reconciled nation’. However, this stance must contend with those who are drawn towards assimilating First Peoples and their knowledges in with everyone else—those who work from the other end of the RSC (see Figure 6.1). Chaney explains this predisposition by the Australian community to see everyone as the same in enacting reconciliation, very clearly. He explains that whereas the other aspect of reconciliation is about ‘Closing the Gap’ this second important aspect is ‘the more difficult second stream’ because:

Australians are instinctively assimilationist and think that all these other problems [connected to Closing the Gap] would be solved if Aboriginal people simply became like us. ... Whether you look at it at an international level in terms of constitutional recognition, treaty, all those things or you look at it in terms of relationships in the classroom, in workplaces, in streets and villages, that’s actually the harder part and *the counterintuitive part of reconciliation for most Australians is that it involves recognition of continuing difference, and respect for continuing difference.*

This insight about assimilative propensities not only captures findings from this project, it also resonates with words written more than a decade earlier by BurrIDGE (2007) when she noted that the formal reconciliation process were ‘no more than a normative movement acting to reinforce old style assimilationist tendencies’ (p. 73). In contrast, the requirement for a more rights-based partnering expression of reconciliation was the strongest call by the Reconciliation Elders, and was encapsulated by these words M. Dodson shared with me—more than 25 years after his similar explanation at Corroboree 2000 (see Chapter 2).

We have these rights but they’re not always respected, recognised and protected. Indigenous peoples, because we’re primarily First Discoverers, or First Peoples it’s often referred to, or First Nations and because of the nature of our societies we have peculiar human rights that are fixed to us and are fixed to us only ... I mean reconciliation is in part about understanding these things. Understanding the difference and not getting hung up about that.

#### **6.4.4 Research within the Indigenous Space**

Given that this project was exploring reconciliation within the university sector, it is imperative that reconciliation be evident in the research area. Though as a Reconciliation Elder noted, ‘I think the harder issue [to address] is research’ (Interviewee #26). The ways in which the academy (mis)understands Indigenous standpoints within the research context was powerfully raised by two participants, but there were broader references to Indigenous research made by most participants. Although the RAPs referred to increasing and supporting ‘Indigenous research’, only the Melb RAP made explicit reference to acknowledging or differentiating Indigenous knowledges within the research space. According to Foley (2019), there is a lack of understanding regarding Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous knowledges evident in universities, even though the current RAP documents, along with the UoN strategic plan, indicate positive intentions to engage in this area. The UoN strategic plan states: ‘We are resolute in our commitment to excellence in Indigenous education and research and to the importance of Indigenous culture and knowledges’. Melb’s website indicates strong commitment and resourcing in this area, which is clearly evidenced in their Research @ Melbourne Indigenous research Implementation Framework 2013–2018 and now 2018–2022 (Melbourne University, 2019). As per both current RAPs, ANU and Curtin were finalising their Indigenous research strategies [as of May, 2019]. The matter of how research could create ‘transformative practice for the institution with regard to its relationship with Indigenous peoples’ (Bunda, 2014, p. 45) is a space that requires further attention.

#### **6.5 RAPs and reconciliation into the future**

McLaughlin and Whatman (2011) believed that ‘universities can make more of a contribution to the spirit of Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and enhance race relations in Australia’ (p. 368), which was confirmed during the policy ethnography. The repetition in the current RAPs of targets named in the earlier RAPs and more importantly, the words of the Reconciliation Elders—especially First Nation participants—who had patiently been working at changing and challenging universities for decades all concurred that ‘the university is heading in the right direction, although they could do more. They still could do more’ (Interviewee #13).

### **6.5.1 RAPs, Reconciliation and numbers: re-colonisation or decolonisation**

In planning for the future, it is helpful to remember that the formal process of Reconciliation in Australia, was the result of political concessions, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. This caveat, explains the remnant cynicism about reconciliation expressed by First Nations participants:

Reconciliation never sat well with me; never ever sat well. I hated the word. I hated it when it came out and the thing was I thought well what the hell have I got to reconcile? I've got nothing to reconcile because I didn't do anything. It's all been done to us as Aboriginal people (Interviewee #13).

This distrust in the formal process, has been explored by several Australian First Nation scholars (e.g. Bunda, 2014, Moreton-Robinson, 2007, Dodson in Keefe, 2003). This wariness has also extended itself to the RAP program, which also is, for many First Nations people, a compromise following plans for constitutional recognition, sovereignty and treaty being dismissed by successive governments. As Watson (2007) wrote, 'while many Aboriginal people have embraced and supported the reconciliation movement, there have been just as many Aboriginal people who did not' (p. 20). Bunda et al. (2012, p. 943) referred to 'the administrative gaze of policy thus swallows Indigenous peoples' identities in the fetish of statistics, objectifying through numbers'. Some of the reporting requirements, including those of RAPs, mark success in reconciliation targets in terms of numbers of Indigenous students and staff: 'the RAP has landed in a space that's a reporting space and we still speak about this in terms of what the government wants to know and hitting targets. If I was to be at [X university] for another 20 years I would probably be much more honest and direct about my utter frustration with that' (Interviewee #16). The RAPs require quantifiable targets and regular reporting: 'it's the reality of the numbers that it comes down to' (Interviewee #6) and thus could be accused of feeding this fetish of recolonization in the way they need to categorise the 'Other', with the need for numbers for related reports for RA.

Thus, the inclusion of a university RAP as the instrumental part of a university's Reconciliation process, needs to model the decolonial processes advocated by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) and not be 'a rhetorical to reconciliation without the substantial follow through' (p. 223). Their 'institution approach to decolonial indigenization' (p. 224) involves treaties rather than RAPs and suggests ways forward for the Canadian academy that may be worth exploring.

Another potential decolonial reconciliation act, is the research methodology named in Chapter 4 describing the researcher being interviewed by a First Nations Elder. The RRS, provided a different, exciting way of rethinking part of the research for this thesis. This was doing ‘*r*’econciliation to appraise ‘*R*’econciliation, which could be seen as a space to *decolonise* the academy. In the RRS, my response to Jeannie when asked about how I felt about reconciliation, I talked about it being broader than just being about how people connected, that rather it was also about connection to land, water and whatever we understood to be ‘Australia’:

At this moment in history, reconciliation in terms of how we work—how we are beside our First Peoples in this country, besides our Aboriginal people, I believe it’s not just about Aboriginal people but it’s to do with the whole country, the whole land, the whole space we call Australia and its land and waters.

Another more significant counterpoint finding, was that a RAP with its list of actions could act as prompts to decolonising the university. Calma explicitly commented on this while we discussed the importance of the incremental small, but important changes, instigated by a RAP, indicating evidence of reconciliation. He was describing the introduction of using Indigenous names for places in a university: ‘So it’s a great step in the process of decolonisation. There’s a long way to go beyond that but it’s a good starter point’. This connects to the next point about such changes taking place over time.

### **6.5.2 Enabling right relationship based evolutionary reconciliation**

The data demonstrated that finding ways to have right relationships between First Nations and other peoples was fundamental to the idea of reconciliation in a university. That the process was also dynamic, situated and generational were the other key aspects of this relationship building. It is more like Kohen’s (2009) version of reconciliation, who believed that for a meaningful expression of Reconciliation in the public domain, forgiveness and personal reconciliation needed to be separate from formal reconciliation. Therefore, RAPs would fall into real expressions of the former and, for Kohen, have a place.

The First Nations interviewees were clear that reconciliation *would* happen in a slow evolutionary way over generations and result in changes that benefitted all. However, they also expressed a restrained weariness at the limitations of the current university system. For example, there was a strong theme about assimilationist actions, such as Indigenous peoples’

business all being placed in the ‘equity bucket’, alongside the paradoxical evidence of an increase in the expressions and performance of respect, such as Acknowledgements of Country and conversations about the integration of Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum. As one interviewee acknowledged, ‘there's a constant struggle in the reconciliation movement to get beyond the notion of assimilation’ (Interviewee #17), indicating that such a struggle for reconciliation will eventually triumph if right relationships and respect for First peoples are there. When discussing his university’s process of integrating Indigenous knowledges, Thomas (2015) emphasised the importance of this type of right relationships because ‘bringing Indigenous knowledges into the Western academic canon requires context. This context is provided through connections and connectedness’ (p. 6).

The implication from this research, which included my understanding from experiencing ‘katajiny warniny’ on Noongar Country and the RSS, was that Indigenous knowledges are ontologically challenging and yet complementary to the Western knowledges system. It could also be useful to consider ideas about university reconciliation pertaining to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges alongside those of scholars such as Barnett (2011, 2018) and his idea of creating the ecological university and Maxwell (2012), with his focus on universities valuing and seeking wisdom.

Expectations about changes related to reconciliation and the RAP from many of the non-Indigenous people appeared to romanticise the good being done or being planned for the future. I reflected on the fact that I too fall into that group, which is part of the reason why I commenced the research. While ‘such progressive desires are important, but they must also be seen as based in fantasy—a redemptive fantasy of unity that attempts to overcome history and ongoing effects of colonisation’ (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 482). Davis (2016b, as cited in Maddison, 2019) believed that RAPs are an expression of this fantasy because they are ‘a hyper-optimistic form of “philanthrocapitalism” underpinned by Indigenous success stories intended to satiate ‘the constant thirst for upbeat, optimistic stories that give white Australia hope’ (p. 192).

The fact that these RAPs are shaped by a trademarked template, prescribed and approved by an outside body, also can stifle the expression of this evolving reconciliation. And the data shows clearly that the process of reconciliation in universities that these RAPs attempt to

guide and show, is changing and varies for each institution. This process is a living state of being; it is not a definitive process. There are those who will continue to see the RAP as a most useful tool and a discipline for making change, as described by Calma:

The discipline behind a RAP has been important. For governments it's a very important way to achieve a lot of their objectives and to do it in a way that's inclusive and empowering. Not just the hope of something happening. ... When you look at a cost benefits analysis, the amount of money that the government has injected is a pittance compared to the outcome for society. That's why we continually promote this is not an Aboriginal issue, this is about a much broader issue of social development of the community.

For others, however, there can be a discomfort regarding how RAPs sit within the reconciliation spaces of universities. Their key purpose, regarding putting good intentions into measurable actions for university as a business, will inevitably result in conflicts and annoyances in university environments. This is true of various things to do with bureaucracy and business in universities when they clash with academic freedom. As one academic interviewee lamented, 'We've tried the last three years to try and get a RAP up and trying to work within RAs framework. We gave up. We gave up six months ago. RAs conditions are just too' (Interviewee #15). Or as another said, instead of 'project planning' a RAP, 'now we're doing it slightly differently. It's a much slower, deeper process' (Interviewee #20), which led to the decision to not have a RAP but to create other expressions of reconciliation.

Transposed into the intercultural space in which reconciliation activities happen, there are strong themes from the data regarding how to have relationships and partnerships and work together. As carefully stated by Interviewee #21, 'reconciliation is not about us asking non-Indigenous people to do everything for us. It's about stuff that we should be doing in partnership'. However, these findings, including allowing and taking time, listening and speaking with the broader First Nations community and importantly making space and place for Indigenous knowledges, do not sit well with the measured, standardised managerial space. The RAPs attempt to make reconciliation meaningful in the corporate university, which values this measurement of hours, workload models, student numbers and university rankings, but as noted, it is also flawed. In alluding to space, there is a notion that this is the 'third space', the messy state of being in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people meet and where Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledge systems clash and collaborate.

Perhaps this reconciliation space is the space that Bhabha (1994) alluded to when he wrote about ‘these “in-between” spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself’ (pp. 1–2). This third space allows for new ways of being in relationship and allows for reconciliation to occur.

### **6.5.3 A coalition of innovative, courageous (maybe) maverick, leaders**

To enact rights-based reconciliation on a visible scale, universities need to be places that have a coalition of leaders led by VCs and include First Nations senior staff within that coalition. It cannot be led by lone leaders at the DVC level. Individual, chance leadership is inadequate for system changes. This is evident in the ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people engage in a university are still constrained by the often unintended racism, which emanates from the system as a by-product of its colonial legacy. This was evidenced in a simple way, by the ‘cup-o-tea’ yarn I included in Chapter 1. Therefore, to make changes, what is needed is ‘visible support from the Vice Chancellor and not just an introductory note at the beginning of a RAP. Their actions have to be seen so that others see that this is a university requirement and the RAP has the support from the highest person in the institution’ (Interviewee #15). Otherwise, under the current governance structures, First Nations people and their knowledges and anything to do with the Indigenous space will be relegated to be one of several competing issues, usually as part of an equity and diversity list.

While this positioning of Australia’s First Nations continues, universities are prevented from being community leaders who could demonstrate and challenge the settler population as to how and why they could/should reconcile with First Nations. Without a coalition of senior executive leaders in universities who have the courage to lead rights-based reconciliation and take the risk to do things differently to other universities, the evolution of a more just, reconciled state will take several generations to be realised. This reconciled state involves creating more senior positions for First Nations people in the university, but importantly it also would promote and support Indigenous knowledges and ways of being as the normal part of the learning, teaching and researching in Australia into the future. As Larkin (2013) has so clearly stated, ‘A university that is able to demonstrate both a principled and operationalised commitment to transforming its corporate and academic culture, in this manner positions



itself as a university of choice for Indigenous people and can also provide transformable knowledges for non-Indigenous people’ (p. 228).

Although the RAPs varied in how they named the VCs in terms of responsibility for targets, (see Table 5.3), the interview data and RRS were in agreement that the VCs should be the primary champions for RAPs. However, it was usually at the DVC level that the actual work associated with the RAPs was happening and being reported. More broadly, the VCs must be the ones who were more prominently leading reconciliation. Given what is in the data, for sustainable transformational change to occur, there must be a *coalition* of leaders at the top three executive levels—VC, DVC and PVC—and not lone champions. Such a coalition of senior executives would include a combination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff who all must agree on strategies. A key reason for agreement is that without the collaboration and support of senior executives, there will always be inadequate budget and continual blocks to changes because of conflicting priorities and competition for resources.

This coalition of university leaders, according the data and echoed in what has been said by other significant community leaders and scholars over time, should listen and work with First Nations people. As Patrick Dodson instructed his audience in how to advance reconciliation more than two decades ago when he was the Chairperson of CAR, ‘There needs to be more talking *with*, and less *talking about*, Aboriginal people in all those forums. More sitting down together and less shutting out’ (Dodson, 1996). This ‘reconciliation listening’ would entail the academy to be creative and innovative about governance, not just the physical spaces and the curriculum, and to thus have Indigenous people in the academy, leading and working beside non-Indigenous people to shape it for the future. These ideas are further reinforced by Freire (1970) who reminds everyone that:

The oppressed are not ‘marginals,’ are not living ‘outside’ society. They have always been ‘inside’ the structure which made them ‘beings for others’. The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves (p. 47).

The alternative is the status quo, in which universities are simply lucky to have the type of generous unacknowledged leadership of First Nations people, some of whom I have met during this project, who may be dismissive of RAPs, but who remained courageously

committed to making a difference in the reconciliation space and as one Reconciliation Elder both conceded and advocated:

We as Aboriginal people have got to recognise that this particular space—the ‘reconciliation space’ if you like and also non-Indigenous support—is a really fertile battleground and that we’ve got to get in there and try and garner that non-Indigenous support back towards us. Because that’s where you only get change otherwise we’re going to stay a heavily marginalised minority and we’re going to be stuck there (Interviewee #22).

In his call to make it a space about positive transformation, this Reconciliation Elder enhanced further the understanding of those like Schaap (2004), who viewed formal reconciliation as being able to ‘make available a space for politics within which citizens divided by the memories of past wrongs could debate and contest the terms of their political association’ (p. 538), which would be a safe place for ‘truth-telling’ and challenging and changing how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples work and live together.

The Universities Australia (2019) report noted that a RAP is ‘a public commitment to provide an environment that supports the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ (p. 34). The lack of accountability or consequences if RAP targets are not met, can make the plan a more aspirational and symbolic document as the targets might not have explicit KPI’s within an university’s strategic plans. As the NATSIHEC report authors stated, ‘there is no public data on progress or attainment of compact or RAP alignment, commitments or targets’ (Buckskin et al., 2018, p. 148), which confirmed the findings of my project, that ‘a RAP is not enough’ (Buckskin et al., 2018, p. 42).

## **6.6 Theories to explain reconciliation in the university context**

### **6.6.1 Theories that offer insight**

Given the findings of this study, there was a need to ascertain which theories explained what had been uncovered. The following six theories or philosophies all offer further insight into the findings: Critical Race Theory, Organisational theories including managerialism and sense-making, ideas about Western knowledges and leadership theories. In outlining aspects of these theories, I note that they do not fully explain how conservative universities appear to be and the overcautious risk-averse processes that prevent such institutions from being more innovative in terms of how they actualise the reconciliation.

### **6.6.1.1     *More on CRT***

The first theory, CRT has already been presented in the Chapter 2 but a key principle to highlight here, which can be used to critique the Australian university reconciliation space, is the acknowledgement of the permanence and pervasiveness of racism in all aspects of society, including the university system (e.g., Gay & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). It was Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) who built on the work of Woodson and Du Bois (1933, as cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 50) to hone in on theorising race within education, specifically the injustices that existed between the white American and the African American peoples. CRT is an often-used theory, but as noted by Dunbar (2008, p. 96), who included discussions about Latino CRT and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's the 'Kaupapa Māori' example (2005, as cited in Dunbar, 2008), people need to 'write their own script' (p. 95) and CRT does not address the situatedness of Australian racism.

The other tenet of CRT, 'interest convergence' (Bell, 1980 cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12) also helps to explain how universities engage in reconciliation, including their use of RAPs, because they serve the interest of the business of that university to be seen to be engaging in what other businesses do as part of their CSR. Given more than 767 organisations had a RAP by 2017 (Reconciliation Australia, 2017) and the desire for connection to other businesses was found in the data and is a requisite of the Elevate RAPs, evidences this aspect of CRT.

### **6.6.1.2     *Organisational change theory and the slow pace of change***

Where organisational change theory is helpful for explaining the data, is in the findings about how an organisation could change for the future of reconciliation. Two ideas help to qualify the analysis of the ideas about change in the data: that universities are simultaneously corporate entities and conservative institutions. In addressing why and how universities engaged with the idea of reconciliation, it is helpful to note that 'universities are not known for their agility' (James et al., 2017, p. 33) and they are unquestionably corporations (Udas & Stagg, 2019). Looking at what resides underneath the undeniable corporatisation of the university provides an opportunity to critically assess strategies for change. The university context is not only about educating students and research, as found in the literature and the findings, it is also about a highly bureaucratic, hegemonic system that values one knowledge

system above all others. Into this system, formal Reconciliation can fit, but it can simultaneously offer a provocation to do things a bit differently:

Reconciliation is often an institutional mechanism....And then the second bit is that it is more of a social movement that reflects the desires of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to reconcile in relationship to our shared colonial history; and find new forms of working together and new forms of relationship. So it's both those things. It's a policy and an institutional administrative process, but it's also a broader social movement (Interviewee #7).

Similarly, this 'organisational change can be considered as 'either discontinuous (revolutionary, or transformational) or continuous (evolutionary, or transactional)' (Warner, 2017. p. 169). This kind of distinction can be useful in understanding the desire by the First Nations Reconciliation Elders for *evolutionary* change, which Warner would label as 'continuous improvement' and therefore an organisation would need to focus on such things as 'the reward system, information technology, workflow processes, or management practices' (p. 169). Van de Ven and Poole (1995, p. 175), described the theoretical frameworks for such change. They referred to life cycle, teleological, dialectical and evolutionary theories for change and explained an evolutionary theory for change within an organisation as being constant and a type of change like a living organism. This is the type of reconciliation change advocated by the senior First Nations people, one which evolves over time. Coupled with that is the notion that 'we judge that change [in an organisation] has occurred against a backdrop of time' (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005, p. 1394) and while the RAPs cover approximately two years at a time, both the interview data and the self-study confirmed that change would take many years. And as one person said 'I hope that things will be different for my children' (Interviewee #25).

If organisational change theory explains the need for an organisation to adapt and change so that it can survive, then such a theory does not fully explicate the findings in this study. For a university to change or adapt its behaviour and become more focused on reconciliation or even engage in any way in reconciliation is currently to date, appears to be irrelevant to its survival as an organisation. A university could continue to be compliant and address whatever aspects of the Indigenous Education Strategy were required by the federal government and Universities Australia, but in terms of evolving towards a change in becoming what could be a reconciled, ecologically just and truly Australian university, in which the knowledge systems of the First Nations were explored and taught alongside the

Western and other knowledge systems, does not appear to be about survival. There are no negative consequences for all universities to simply continue as they are, conservatively changing to survive within the marketplace as long as they adhere to the AQF and the TEQSA Higher Education Standards.

### **6.6.1.3     *An alternative***

Choosing an organisational change strategy, driven by a revolutionary reconciliation-based Indigenous Education Strategy, in which prominence is given to both Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges—which can only occur by giving precedence to the First Nations—is an opportunity for a university to differentiate itself. Currently, no university has chosen to be the university in Australia that positions itself in this way. Instead, all Australian universities continue to operate in similar ways, with a building, or section of a building, that is the centre for their First Nations, usually located on one of their campuses, and the rest of the university comprises the ‘mainstream’. No university has made a way to build and focus on Australia’s Indigenous knowledges as a focal, pivot point to distinguish it from other universities in the country and globally. Additionally, there is confusion about how and why Indigenous centres exist, with people conflating and confusing expectations about Indigenous knowledges, the discipline of Indigenous studies, and the teaching and care of Indigenous students, as noted by Holt:

We play two roles in the university. One of them is to provide expertise and to enhance the environment of the university through providing expertise and knowledge from an Aboriginal perspective. That’s about your inclusive curriculum. That’s about faculties being engaged in attracting students into their discipline areas. It’s about employment. It’s about all of those areas that the RAP provides a foundation for. That’s one of the things that we do, but the other side of what we do is about our own discipline area. It’s about taking the knowledge of our ancestors and what’s been passed on for us in the past and building on that knowledge and ensuring that our knowledge continues to be built on.

One of my recommendations, that reconciliation in a university means not only giving a place to Indigenous knowledges, but also giving these knowledges prominence, echoes Bunda’s (2014) argument that, ‘a real meeting with Indigenous knowledges would mean institutional redistributing of the power to our knowledges and to Indigenous staff as knowledge bearers: as knowers and practitioners of disciplinary expertise’ (p. 239). Also, the Canadian scholar, Smith (2017) stated that, ‘to understand and truly participate in reconciliation, universities

and colleges must reassess their relationship with knowledge' (p. 73). Further, Smith (2017) argued that, 'while it is right to want immediate change, it is only realistic to acknowledge that this change will come with dialogue and reflection, perhaps taking longer than many would prefer' (p. 73).

Australian universities are based on very old institutions, imbued with centuries of history, so it is understandable that change in any sphere will be incrementally slow, given that 'younger organizations tend to have less inertia than older ones' (Hannan & Freeman, 1984, p. 163). As one Reconciliation Elder (Interviewee #18) who has worked in universities for decades stated, 'I still think that it still has a long way to go. I know it's been around for such a long time and to me progress is slow'.

#### **6.6.1.4     *Managerialism and the claimed authority of Western knowledges***

Ball (1998) wrote about 'the increasing commodification of knowledge' (p. 128), which is a challenge to reconciliation within the academy as noted in the findings with the conversations about outputs and KPIs. There is constant pressure to report and adhere to standards and compete against other university providers delivering similar services and educational experiences, alongside rampant managerialism, which includes staff having to continually attend to what is labelled as 'quality' (Ball, 1998, p. 123). Into this place of 'imposed corporatist managerialism' (Duke, 2004, p. 310) exploring the idea of reconciling with a group of people and an epistemology that may not value the same quality control indicators and standards, could be rather difficult for a university. The question Ball (1998) asked of higher education policy, 'both in relation to patterns of convergence in education policy and the re-contextualisation of policy' was, 'whose interests are served?' This question is relevant to ask now more than two decades later, in terms reconciliation between the majority settler population and First Nations within Australian universities.

Ball (2003) later extended his critique of the 'market, managerialism and performativity' (p. 215) within higher education to demonstrate how it impinged upon and forever changed the understanding of knowledge. Duke in his scathing depiction of Australian universities would concur with Ball that knowledge was commodified. This commodification of higher education created the place for the trademarked RAP; a plan created precisely for businesses and because universities were now also businesses, they could develop RAPs. As Breidlid (2013) noted, 'the epistemic penetration of Western hegemony has been so successful that it

seems difficult to perceive alternatives or supplements to Western epistemic domination’ (p. 19). However, as the data has shown, (Indigenous) rights-base reconciliation *does* intentionally allow, and indeed expect the ‘alternative’, that Indigenous Knowledges are considered alongside Western. The ‘third space’ in this instance becomes one that ‘generates new possibilities by questioning entrenched categorisations of knowledge systems and cultures and opens up new avenues with and this is important to underline, a counter-hegemonic strategy’ (Breidlid, 2013, p. 47).

#### **6.6.1.5     *The ‘bland eternity of the same’ and the RAP template***

To add further to the literature about universities expression of sameness (e.g., Codling & Meek, 2006; Duke, 2004; Huisman & Meek, 2007; Meek, Goedegebuure & Huisman, 2000) and the limited visions of innovation in the futurist reports about universities (e.g., Goedegebuure et al., 2017; Halloran & Friday, 2018), there is the existence of a template and the insights of a 20th century sociologist. First, the four-tiered framework (Reconciliation Australia, 2019a), where an organisation can choose the RAP template they believe they are most capable of aspiring to and delivering on. The template for the highest level RAP, the ‘Elevate RAP’, is the only one of the four templates that is not available to be downloaded as communication with RA is required before being permitted to use that one. If you get approval from RA to use this level, as has two of the project universities, the implication is, you are more advanced and working at a higher than others using lower level RAPs. Conversely, the first level ‘Reflect RAP’ template (Reconciliation Australia, 2019a) implies contemplation and possibilities. As universities’ are ‘in a competitive quest for survival (Duke, 2004, p.302) anyway, these RAP levels would appear to simply encourage further competition rather than encourage collaboration as was advised by Reconciliation Elders. Also, to enact rights-based reconciliation requires maverick, innovative leadership to do something different, rather than continue to be one of many educational businesses all doing the same type of work, being part of ‘the bland eternity of the Same’ (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 130).

#### **6.6.1.6     *Sense-making and valuing knowledge systems***

Sense-making theory as defined by Weick (1993) explained ‘that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs’ (p. 635). Along with the understanding that ‘people realise their reality, by

reading into their situation patterns of significant meaning’ (Morgan, Frost and Pondy, 1983, p. 24, as cited in Weick, 1993, p. 635), sense-making can help explain the complex, sometimes conflicting, explanations for reconciliation in the data, even within the defined structure of RAPs. Sense-making also clarifies how the shared mindsets of the educational bureaucracy in the university appear to have a shared mental model of reconciliation being separate to considering the positioning of Indigenous knowledges, thus unintentionally demonstrating ‘an intrinsic sense of the superiority of their own ideologies and value systems’ (Teasdale, 1995, p. 588). Yet the First Nations interviewees were clear, as espoused by one who is a senior executive, ‘the university *has* to value Indigenous knowledges’ (Interviewee #13).

As an example of such valuing, one interviewee referred to the Queensland University of Technology’s position of Associate Director Academic Indigenous Knowledges, as something extraordinary in the sector. An example from one of the original RAPs that attempted to make sense of the knowledge systems by making a measurable action related to their academic staff induction to the university was to understand the differences between Western knowledges and Indigenous knowledges (Curtin RAP 2008–2013). The first four RAPs had all named Indigenous knowledges in various ways, but in relation to the current RAPs, only the Melb RAP explicitly includes a reference to this epistemology (see Table 5.4). Others refer to ideas connected to Indigenous capabilities, competencies and/or perspectives. Giving Indigenous knowledges prominence, or simply taking them from being ‘invisible to visible’ ( Rigney, 2001, p.10) is strongly supported by Rigney (2001).

Finally, there was the challenge from a First Nations participant, who was one of the youngest interviewees in the project, who wanted me to make sense of the importance of senior leaders in a university influencing the system to make space for First Nations knowledges within the university:

I guess what I am talking about, when we embed some of this—the Indigenous agenda within the culture, ... within the fabric of the institution. Again it’s that next evolution around with it, regardless around who is in the seat there. At what point does it actually get ... into the mesh and the fabric?... Because there’s cultural traditions and standards and positions that this university has, regardless of its position. Who’s in ... those seats of leadership as well? I think we’re on the pathway, but again, we’re not there (Interviewee #6).



Nakata (2007) noted another key aspect relevant within a university environment was that First Nations people have rights regarding how their knowledge is held and used (as per the UNDRIP). Others, such as Lederach (1997, p. 27), suggested that for any sort of reconciliation to be successful it required innovative ways of looking at how we usually function. Short (2005) expanded on the concept of being innovative, saying a university would need to ‘reject the assumption of illegitimate settler state sovereignty in favour of affording Indigenous peoples equal recognition and respect by instigating legitimising nation to nation negotiations’ (p. 278).

#### **6.6.1.7     *Wise, maverick, courageous, transformative leadership***

##### *Indigenous leadership*

Before considering the wider findings on leadership, it is worth noting the importance, yet messiness of the concept for First Nation leaderships within the university as an aspect of how the university does reconciliation. As noted in Table 5.4, there is a desire in all the RAPs to recognise the leadership of First Nation Elders, but how this is acknowledged with the formal university structure and whether it actually happens and has influence remains unknown. Wright, Culbong, Jones, O’Connell and Ford (2013) created a framework with evidence of how this can be successfully done. The process of how Elders can offer counsel could be informed by Wright’s ‘Nyoongar Framework’ (Wright et al., 2013; Goff & Crane, 2013) as a guide. This framework has already been successfully used when First Nations Elders worked within faculty and community organisation contexts. With direction from Wright and his team, the framework may have application within universities and would complement and accommodate the idea of including Reconciliation Elders to inform university governance. It could be a tool for university leaders, who are courageous mavericks, to collaborate with Elders and engender transformational change on their campuses. Further, the values named by Haar, Roche and Broughham (2018), which underpin Maori leadership and are echoed in the findings of my project, are *Whakaiti*—humility, *Ko tau rourou and manaakitanga*—altruism, *Whanaungatanga*—others, *Tāria te wā and kaitiakitanga*—long-term thinking, guardianship, and finally, *Tikanga Māori*—cultural authenticity. The authors (Haar et al., 2018) cited literature to support their finding that Maori leadership was ‘not viewed as hierarchical, but as a stewardship of others, including future and past generations and importantly is relational in orientation’ (p. 3). Given the many

references to the importance of ancestors and future generations in shaping reconciliation by interviewees in the project, although apart from ANU's RAP, this was not mentioned in the original RAPs.

### *Leadership broadly*

Broadly, the explanations for the concepts of wisdom and courage working through transformational leaders, are all applicable in explaining key findings from this project. First, it is noted that mavericks work in places that support them with resources (Ray et al., 1997, p. 29) and encourage innovation, which is 'a unique process in an organisation' (Ray et al., 1997, p. 29) and a concept appropriated for making changes inspired by technology rather than working with First Nations people. McMurry (1974, as cited in Ray et al., 1997) defined the characteristics of a maverick executive as being their 'exceptional drive, courage, optimism and decisiveness' (p. 21). The maverick is also wise, exhibiting a wisdom that 'avoids extremes and therefore improves adaptability because both the cautious and the confident are closed minded which means neither makes good judgements' (Weick, 1993, p. 64). Weick's explanation (1993) for how to be a wise leader referred to making decisions from a position near the middle of these two extremes. This philosophy can be applied to explaining both the inadequate and the exemplary, leadership in a university around reconciliation and also about how the RAP has been shaped and positioned. Coupled with Maxwell's (2012) work challenging universities to focus on wisdom as 'the basic aim of academic inquiry should be, not just to acquire knowledge, but rather to enhance our capacity to realize what is of value in life' (p. 702) and definition for maverick leadership, there are further ideas to explain the findings.

Transformative leadership theory also helps to explain further the types of reconciliation leaders in this study. Shields (2010) describes a transformative leader as being one whom 'lives with tension and challenge: requires moral courage' (p. 563) and because 'so much flows from the temperament and the personality of the person at the top. If you've got the right person at the top it's that person who sets the standard and the expectation' (Interviewee #16). Just like the leaders in Shields' (2010) study, the leadership required to enact and normalise reconciliation is one in which the practice is not about 'effectiveness and efficiency', but about providing 'a critique of injustices and inequities and the promise of a better and more equitable future for all children' (Tillich, 1952, p. 583).

### *Leadership ideas summarised*

In summary, the type of leadership required in universities to enact rights-based reconciliation is one that I would label as ‘courageous maverick leadership’. Also, a coalition of such leaders are needed, of whom one must be the VC, to enact rights-based reconciliation, and to potentially transform the academy. Without such leadership, reconciliation will continue to slowly evolve but as encapsulated by one of the participants: ‘if you haven’t got that [leadership from the very top] then you are fighting with one hand behind your back’ (Interviewee #17). Given the pressure on universities to conform so that they can be competitive, differentiation that includes a strong focus on what this project has labelled as rights-based reconciliation, requires a leadership team, not just one or two senior executives leading a RAP.

#### **6.6.2 Theories that create synergy**

The preceding section discussed theories that offered some explanation regarding aspects of what was found in the data, but they did not take into consideration some of the deeply embedded structural institutional racism that is very localised to the bureaucracy that is the university system. This Western world knowledge system began in Bologna Italy during the 11th century, spread through Europe and in the 12th century evolved into the establishments of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in Britain. It is noteworthy that it was at Cambridge, around the time of the British colonisation that ‘the ideal curriculum was also to include a study of the development of history and the role and legacy that it had on a student’s intellectual discipline and character’ (Anderson, 2014, p. 33). The colonisation of the Australian continent by the British meant that these values and understanding of a university were recreated in Australia and ‘which to the Indigenous Australian is without question an imperial construct’ (Foley, 2019, p. 28).

The three following key theories that have informed the analysis of the findings were introduced in the literature review (see Chapter 2), however, I connect them together here as they are critical to shaping a new synergistic theory.

##### **6.6.2.1 More on reconciliation theories**

The data have provided many understandings of reconciliation within the Australian university context and they all could be placed beside theories and philosophies of others.

One definition of reconciliation offered here to help place the proposed synergistic theory into the larger context is the one already cited from Brounéus (2003) who wrote of reconciliation that involved truth telling and acknowledgement of past wrongs while working on creating a ‘constructive relationships toward sustainable peace’ (p. 20). There was also the issue of finding other theories to explain revelations in the data because ‘there are many different understandings of what should be focused on in the process of reconciliation (Brounéus, 2003, p. 16). The other concept to capture was Indigenous rights and how this, for First Nations participants, was fundamental to the discussion of reconciliation, though as noted, it was not something strongly reflected in any of the RAPs (see Table 5.4). Here, I also acknowledge Bunda (2014), who advocated for what I would label ‘real reconciliation conversations’ in universities and wrote that reconciliation in a university must be about having a ‘dialogue about Indigenous sovereignty that clearly understands the substance of what it is that Aboriginal people are asking for’ (p. 188).

Finally there is the reconciliation theorising by Lederach (1997) who offered insights into the importance of relationship building rather than finding a definitive ‘resolution of issues’ (p. 24). That ‘relationship is the basis of both the conflict and its *long-term solution* [my emphasis]’ (Saunders & Slim, 1994, as cited in Lederach, 1997, p. 26) confirmed that reconciliation was about finding ways for the groups who are in conflict, staying engaged with each other, however difficult this might be. This affirmed the research finding that staying in the battlefield and the critical significance of recognition along with respectful relationship were the crux of the evolutionary reconciliation that was advocated by the First Nations participants in this study. Although the RAPs largely contained short-term targets, both the interviewees and the self-study revealed that reconciliation is mostly about slow evolutionary changes, in which Indigenous rights are enacted, where we fumble to enact this ‘reconciliation’ process that is ‘much more palatable than land rights and treaties. Maybe that’s what the reconciliation movement is at the moment. Maybe we just have years of getting to know each other and then we move to this thing called recognition’ (Interviewee #21).

#### **6.6.2.2     *Indigenous standpoints versus Indigenist standpoints***

In framing my synergistic theory it is also important to acknowledge the contribution of standpoint theory and in doing so, differentiate between the word ‘Indigenist’ and

‘Indigenous’. First, when using the concept of standpoint, I refer to the place from where I am looking at my world and determining what I need to be attentive to. It is a socially constructed positioning to be attentive to those who are in the minority, with some critical race awareness of the power and the privilege, which is held in this case by the largely white non-Indigenous majority in the academy over the minority Indigenous peoples of the academy. A standpoint can be made more specific by referring to Indigenous standpoint, which can only be experienced by a person who is of First Nation’s heritage (e.g., Nakata, 1998; Rigney, 1999; Foley, 2003). Larkin (2013) is helpful in building on Nakata’s (1998, 2007) work, supporting this project’s outcomes and further elucidating what Indigenous standpoints mean within a university context. He reminds universities of their potential to create a better place by including First Nations people in the academy, leading and sharing their knowledges. He writes that this ‘presence of Indigenous standpoints can transform universities to be epistemologically diverse by embracing multiple standpoints. Indigenous – and indeed all Australian – students, staff and communities have a right to this’ (Larkin, 2013, p. 248).

As an extension of Indigenous standpoints, I believe Indigenist standpoint theory offers a further nuance and captures the essence of a positioning by people who ‘stand in the shoes’ of First Nations peoples and recognise their knowledge systems as stated in the UNDRIP (Ma Rhea, 2015). It is that subtle difference between those who understand that in a university, what needs to be at the fore is reconciliation built first on justice, rather than on social justice – thus expecting and respecting Indigenous standpoints, *and* encouraging Indigenist standpoints. This is supplemented further by McLaughlin and Whatman (2011), who argued that ‘Indigenous knowledge incorporates but transcends social justice ideas’ (p. 366).

Indigenist standpoint theory is also connected to the deep listening (see Chapter 4) that shaped how I position myself as a researcher, and it also informs this synergistic theory. The significant aspect of Indigenist standpoint theory in critiquing reconciliation within the university is the explanation that ‘knowledges that have shaped how the position of Indigenous people is understood both by others and by themselves as they view their position through the knowledge of others’ (Nakata, 1998, p. 4). As already noted (see Chapters 3 and 4), Dadirri (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 1993) and ‘Boodja Neh’, (Johnston & Forrest (in review) are essential because they are about deep listening and connection to the land, as defined by Australia’s First Nations people. This version of listening and relationship, in combination

with counsel from the Reconciliation Elders, is critical for rights-based reconciliation to occur.

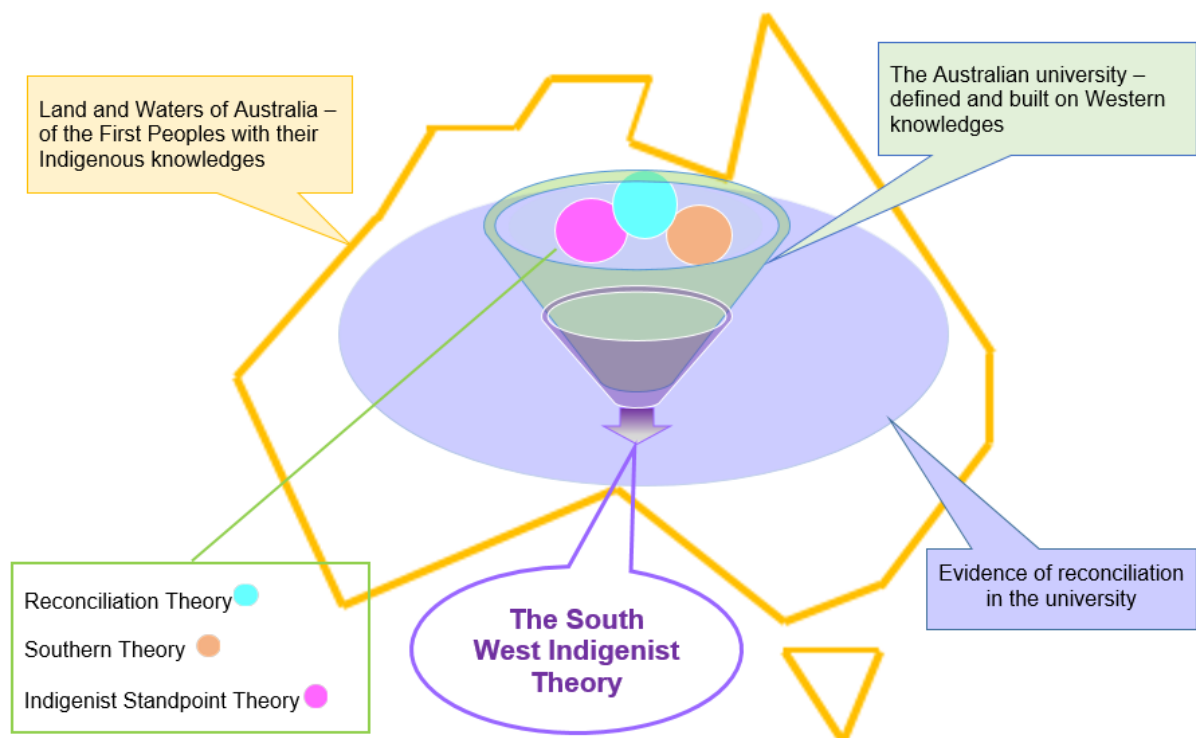
### **6.6.2.3     *More on Southern theory***

The third theory is Connell's (2007) Southern theory, with its capacity to demand attention for those who are both First Nations and the colonisers and settlers who have known the 'deep prior experience of subjection to globalizing powers' (p. 65) in the global South. Along with the idea that 'we can move towards a sharing of experience and mutual respect as the reconciliation movement of the 1990s believed' (Connell, 2007, p. 203), these aspects inform and claim space within this synergistic theory. Bell (2017) contended that, 'it seems to me that what makes theory 'southern' is not so much where we are working as that we work from a political, critical and historically informed awareness of where we are' (p. 19). Southern theory offers an explanation for what is happening in Australia that allows for the fumbling over the past decades of what is happening in Australian universities. Its focus on the majority world south of the equator rather than the philosophies and epistemologies of Great Britain and Europe make it more relevant to discussions about matters that involve Australia.

Southern theory allowed me to juxtapose the Western knowledge system, from the northern hemisphere, which is the basis for and unquestionably the dominant system in the Australian universities, against the strong understanding that there is something different in its expression south of the equator. I was able to acknowledge that 'contemporary Australia is an immigrant nation that is located in the South and yet problematically dominated by ontological and epistemological orientations towards the North' (Woldeyes & Offord, 2018. p. 25). When it comes to reconciliation, locality and being in place is important. Others have made reference to localising a translation of reconciliation so that it fits that specific place (e.g., Daly, 2001). Arabena (2010) offered words to add to the understanding of reconciliation being not exclusive to people, but to also be inclusive of the land, waters and other aspects of the planet and certainly, the findings of this project, confirm how integral 'place' is to the process of reconciliation in Australian universities.

### 6.6.3 South West Indigenist Theory (SWIT)

The following theory is based on a synthesis of the preceding named theories: Southern theory and Indigenist standpoint theory, mixed within aspects of reconciliation theory. This grounded synergistic theory has emanated from the data and I have named it the ‘South West Indigenist Theory’ (SWIT) (see Figure 6.2) . The reason for this label is that it is underpinned by Southern theory, measured by Indigenous standpoint theory and enfolded by reconciliation theories.



**Figure 6.2: SWIT**

Explained further, Australian universities are grounded in the Great South Land, which are part of the polar south, yet they are built on and are curators, creators and teachers of Western knowledges. These universities are also on First Nations lands, where many of the descendants of the First Nations lead, learn, teach and research within them. The degree to which universities are reconciled as defined by the data can be explained using this synergistic theory.

I choose to position the word ‘South’ before ‘West’, even though clearly our universities are shaped and based within Western epistemologies. This positioning claims that for reconciliation to occur in the academy, one has to give precedence to the South and to the inherent knowledge systems of the First Nations of the Great South Land, Australia. This call to give precedence is underpinned by the acknowledgement of the unique, inherent rights of First Peoples made via the UNDRIP, which has been repeatedly demanded by First Nations Elders and scholars, such as Davis (2008) who argued for it broadly within law and the political system and, Moreton-Robinson et al. (2011, p. 56 ) who advocated more specifically for rights within education:

Indigenous higher education is to become institutionalized and prioritised as core business and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence at all levels should be an essential element of what it is to be an Australian university. This requires our First Nation status to be recognised in accordance with the UNDRIP and embedded in university policies.

SWIT acknowledges starting from the pivot point of First Nations rights as articulated especially, although not exclusively, in Articles 14 and 15 of the UNDRIP. Article 14 states that ‘Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning’ (United Nations, 2008). It is also noteworthy to refer to sections of Article 15 because it refers to respecting Indigenous knowledges: ‘Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information’ (United Nations, 2008).

This synergistic theory captures the intersection of the epistemologies and experiences of the people who are the evidence of reconciliation in Australian universities. The evolutionary transformational reconciliation process is ongoing, has no finite, definitive endpoint and is all that can be promised for the future. However, the existence and the manifestation of, and even the aspiration to, a reconciled and hopeful state can be explained by using SWIT. This is the lens that also allowed me to look at everything that has happened and to then explain what was the status quo as well as what could happen into the future. This synergistic theory also allowed me to hold and position the wisdom of the Reconciliation Elders. Hopefully, SWIT could be considered to be what Connell (2017) referred to as ‘serious postcolonial



scholarship [which] offers a more plural and diverse picture of the world than mainstream scholarship' (p. 9).

## **6.7 Summarising the analysis**

### **6.7.1 Reconciliation: appraised by SWIT and mapped on RSC**

How reconciliation is actualised and organised, often with RAPs, in Australian universities can be evaluated using the SWIT and mapped as being on a spiralling, overlapping continuum, somewhere between the extremes of assimilationist versus rights-based reconciliation. The experience of this reconciliation within universities exists in its best form as being the respected relationships and listening spaces at the heart of the 'cultural interface' (Nakata, 2007), based on Indigenous rights and acknowledging Indigenous peoples and their epistemologies as being intrinsic to the knowledge-making, research, learning and leadership of universities. At the other extreme of the reconciliation continuum is the largely performative and quasi-tokenistic versions that include assimilating First Nations peoples and matters by relegating them to equity and diversity areas as part of the 'equity bucket'.

### **6.7.2 Coalition of leaders with Reconciliation Elders working for change**

There are Reconciliation Elders associated with Australian universities who have much wisdom about how universities could be innovative and who have been leaders in enacting a rights-based reconciliation process. Reconciliation Elders were the participants who had decades of experience and active involvement in reconciliation with universities and I have revealed some of their insights in this thesis. Most of these people were senior First Nations participants and a few were non-Indigenous senior participants. The latter group were all people who believed that 'we need to pay attention because there's much to be done. We're just not doing enough of it—as much as we should' (Interviewee #20).

The understanding that 'reconciliation needs to be built from the ground up while being supported from the top down' (James, 2008, p. 120), needs to be extended to not just be about support but about courageous and maverick leadership. There was some evidence that such leadership existed—but not as a team within a university. This leadership cannot be by one member of the executive but rather needs to consist of a coalition of several senior staff, including the VC. Some of these staff must also be First Nations. These leaders need to be unequivocal in demonstrating they understand the unique rights of First Nations within

university environments. Such leaders would know how to listen to, and be directed by, First Nations and they would support Chaney's challenge to lead collaboration within the sector, rather than continue competing. This project's findings resonate with words stated by Shields (2018) who called out to university leaders that 'it is time to end the rankings and the competition to be "best in the world" and to focus on how we can help to create "the best world" in which we can live together in mutual benefit'. Also, as already noted, they would strongly support Indigenous rights as integral to reconciliation and would 'not [be] getting hung up about that' (M. Dodson).

Significantly, my findings are affirmed by the NATSIHEC report (Buckskin et al., 2018), which found that universities could accelerate the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders within the university sector with strong leadership – led by the VC who 'must drive commitment and priority at the highest level to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education' (p. 80).

### **6.7.3 The RAP as a reconciliation-starter option**

The surprising major finding that appeared early in the data was that RAPs may not be necessary for universities to enact reconciliation and indeed, may even be a limitation to the expression of reconciliation in universities. RAPs can be both an incentive and checklist for empowering First Nations, or a tool to assimilate them into the 'equity bucket', part of the expression of that university's CSR, or a mixture of these. RAPs were noted as potentially 'a point of disruption' (Ma Rhea, 2015, p. 96) to promote reconciliatory activities and something to help universities shape their work: 'It's both a useful mechanism internally within institutional structures but also it creates a way to leverage change more broadly. None of that would have happened if we were just developing Indigenous strategies. It does—it picks up on a broader societal agenda' (Interviewee # 7). Conversely, the restrictions placed on one university led them to abandon the idea of a RAP and create a 'reconciliation compact' to fit the context of their environment: 'We've tried the last three years to try and get a RAP up and trying to work within Reconciliation Australia's framework. We gave up.' There were also those who spoke of one day: 'that's what I see as the future, the next generation are not—maybe not having to have RAPs' (Interviewee #26).

The research had started with an assumption that the RAP was key to the enactment of reconciliation within the corporate university, but it was soon evident that reconciliation was

more nuanced and thus the RAPs could be either useful transformation tools, restrictive templates or aspirational plans. In summary, if a university decides to use a RAP, it can be a basic reconciliation framework that provides CSR direction for a university that has also commodified First Nations matters as part of its business.

#### **6.7.4 Concluding comments**

Thus, the answer to the big question about what the idea of Reconciliation in Australian universities looks like, and how it has been articulated through each of the university RAPs has both a simple, and simultaneously a highly complex, answer. At its core the response can be simply stated with the words spoken by Prof Anita Lee Hong, who said to me: ‘Reconciliation for me is about black and white people coming together to acknowledge the past and do something to make the future better’. A combination of the words that comprise the RAP, plus the positioning of the plan within the institution, provide a means for doing this for some universities, but for others, the RAP can be confining or not necessary.

What is clear is that the four universities in the project, largely through their RAPs, were all making attempts within their local context, to thoughtfully interpret formal Reconciliation. This was a Reconciliation that exists in multi-layered forms which can be mapped on the RSC. Some examples of reconciliation show evidence of a strong Indigenist standpoint and are more rights-based while others, though still endeavouring to be reconciliation and often named on RAPs, are more assimilationist in their expression. The tension of where to place a RAP and where to position Reconciliation related work had led some universities to placing it in Indigenous centres or equity offices – neither of which are supported by First Nation scholars and many interviewees, including me as the author. My RRS experience confirms that listening to First Nation peoples in a university – and more specifically in this context, to Reconciliation Elders – leads to a more rights-based reconciliation outcomes. Coupled with inclusive, collaborative governance that values Indigenous knowledges within teaching, learning and research, this would result in better outcomes for First Nations *and* non-Indigenous students and staff. Finally, SWIT enables the appraisal of the reconciliation experience in the university space.

## **7. Conclusion**

Reconciliation is a long way off unfortunately. I mean even in a setting like this, it's on the surface but there's no depth to it. That's how I view it. There's an action plan, there's these books, there is—but they don't say anything. Well, they might say something but they don't *do* anything. I think it reaches a certain level of people and that's it. So it needs to go much deeper and broader than that. I don't know how. Maybe it's something that we have to work together more rigorously on. But it's finding that time, energy—and the right people (Interviewee #18).

### **7.1 Introducing the final chapter**

This chapter begins with words from a Reconciliation Elder, who is herself one of 'the right people' who are needed to inspire reconciliation in a university. The document analysis, interviews and self-study were the three sources of data collection and analyses that threaded their way through this policy ethnography, to these final words.

The policy ethnography revealed via the RAPs, that reconciliation in universities is occurring in various forms along a continuum. The SWIT provides a way to talk about the reconciliation activities as mapped onto this continuum. Here is an example of how the SWIT can be used to reflect and assess encounters or incidents between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. As acknowledged by the SWIT (see Figure 6.2), the ontological and epistemological aspects based 'On-Country' within the university environment are also critical to the explanation.

The chapter now concludes this thesis with a summary of the key findings of the policy ethnography, a restatement of the new synergistic theory, the SWIT, and the consequent output of a hybrid methodological approach, the RRS. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study and some recommendations for universities, suggestions for future research and closing comments.

### **7.2 Strengths and contribution**

Interviews were held with significant individuals who were associated with RAPs, which included people from the universities chosen for the project, Reconciliation Australia staff and others connected to the four RAPs. The outcomes have led to an original contribution in

the form of the RSC to describe reconciliation and also the synergistic SWIT to enable an appraisal of that experience specific to Australian universities. Finally, the hybrid RRS is a reconciliation research method that originated from this project.

### **7.2.1 Significance of findings**

This study explored the nexus between four universities' stated commitments to reconciliation via their RAPs and associated documents and the ensuing practices purportedly connected to these plans. This outcomes make a useful and original contribution to scholarship in the area of Reconciliation and more specifically to the history of Australian Reconciliation in higher education. It also offers ideas for non-Indigenous university leaders as to how they could approach reconciliation in their university. Further, this study provides contemporary insights into national and local engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are engaged in reconciliation-related activities in higher education environments, which has global application for educational institutions in other countries with First Peoples. Additionally, the issue of reconciliation for Australian universities with offshore locations, often in places with their own First Peoples, is a rich area for exploration prompted by this research.

This study included interviews that were opportunities for me to 'do reconciliation'. Initially, the research process wasn't intentionally designed to be research as 'intervention' (Wright, 2011), but it was always 'research about action and change' that 'challenges and hopefully transforms a system' (p. 41). During this project it became about enacting the process I was exploring. I arrived at this realisation and responsibility during the interview with the first participant who was a First Nations person. In addition to examining the RAPs, this study also revealed the growing role played by national agencies (e.g., Universities Australia and NATSIHEC) in directing how Australian universities engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The findings provide perspectives on how RAPs address attempts to realise Reconciliation in university environments and help inform how reconciliation could be approached in the future.

Ultimately, this research fills a gap in the Australian Reconciliation story because while there is substantial literature in the area of Reconciliation and associated concepts within Peace Studies, there is minimal research about RAPs and their impact in higher education

environments. The first piece to filling the gap, is the synergistic SWIT theory that serves to complement other theories.

### 7.2.2 SWIT

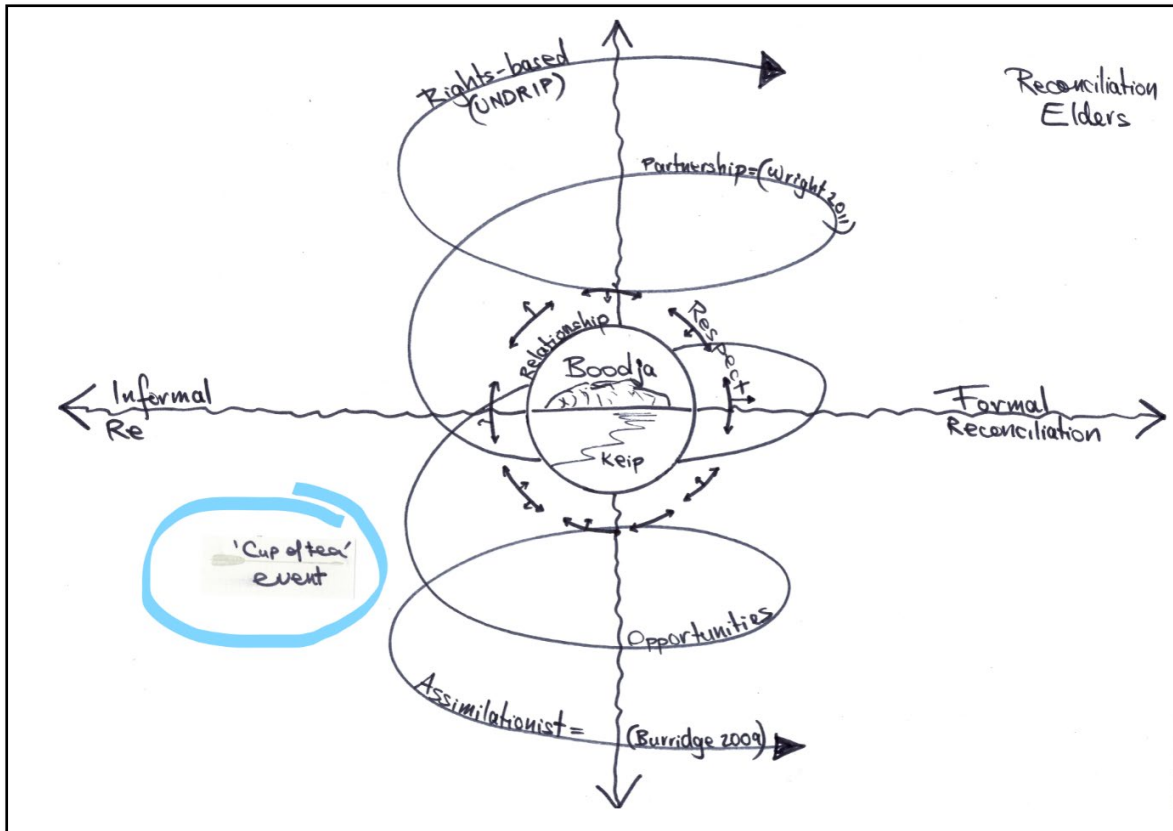
Looking through the various lenses of established theories (see Chapters 2 and 6), SWIT explains how this idea of reconciliation is playing out in Australian universities. SWIT is shaped by the mix of these five features: the three important big theories—Reconciliation Theory, Southern Theory and Indigenous Standpoint Theory—along with the Western knowledges based context of the Australian university and finally, being aware that all this is situated ‘On-Country’ (see Figure 6.2). These elements meld to provide a means to assess and discuss what is occurring on the RSC (see Figure 6.1). Remembering that the RSC provides a simply graphic framework to begin the appraisal of reconciliation.

In whatever form Reconciliation happens and whether or not RAPs are included, non-Indigenous people in universities need to be cognisant that it is they, and the Western-based system they inherited, that must make space for Reconciliation to begin. For any version of this Reconciliation to then occur, as per the findings, Australia’s First Nations also need to engage. As a First Nations Reconciliation Elder declared to me about the formal process of Reconciliation:

Aboriginal people have got nothing to be reconciled about. I would suggest that Reconciliation is coming from the other side of the fence and that’s the process that I think the country needs to deal with and come to terms with and then hopefully at some point we can all be—for want of a better word—be reconciled and walk onto a far better, just and equitable future (Interviewee #22).

#### 7.2.2.1 *Applying the SWIT*

An example of how the SWIT may be useful to the analysis of reconciliation in a university is by applying it to the yarn about the VIP cup-of-tea event that I shared in Chapter 1.1.1. Using the SWIT, I would plot (see Figure 7.1) the incident on the RSC in the lower left quadrant. I would do this because I have judged that the system has displayed limited foresight in how it planned and more importantly how it responded to a situation that could have been an opportunity for reconciliation leadership.



**Figure 7.1 Applying SWIT: an example**

This event may or may not be an action named on a RAP, if that university has a RAP, so I have placed it in the ‘informal’ reconciliation quadrant. There is evidence of respect and some connection to the local First Nations Country, given the building selected for the event was held in the university’s Indigenous centre instead of the VC’s building. The most senior First Nations staff were also invited to the event. However, the need to adhere to Western based hierarchical protocols, and ceremony, led to the exclusion of First Nations staff from their own building and the clumsy attempts to get the special guests out of the garden and inside where they were supposed to be, away from First Nations staff who were not senior enough to be allowed to stay inside. The resulting dissonance for at least some of the nonIndigenous staff (as I was told) coupled with the apparent inability of the leaders to quickly respond indicated a lack of understanding and confidence in negotiating such intercultural (i.e. reconciliation) encounters. There were several points where reconciliation leadership could have been evidenced. Even though professional staff who organise such public events may not have realised the implications of excluding people from the event, the senior non-Indigenous staff could easily have given permission to those in the garden to

come in for the afternoon tea. As long as the two special guests had a drink and something to eat, allowing a few extra people to join in, could have been a simple adjustment. Thus I have plotted the event in the lower left quadrant as I would mark it to be minimally Indigenist in its positioning, and displaying an uncomfortably strong compliance to Western hierarchical and overly bureaucratic protocols, determined by the Western knowledge system.

### **7.2.3 RRS**

My ontological perspective shifted during the life of the research project, especially after the RRS experience (see Chapters 3 and 4). During this experience, my role changed from being the researcher–interviewer to being a participant–interviewee. This provoked me to move from a reasonably self-aware reflexive position, conscious of being part of the privileged, non-Indigenous, white majority group who had begun the project grounded in a commitment to right relationships and social justice, to a more exposed, muddy position of being the one who for a brief time, had a glimpse of being scrutinised and ‘being marked, objectified as the Others’ (Young, 1990, p. 165).

Although earlier chapters explained the self-study, it is relevant to rename it here because it informed the shaping of my analyses and theorisation. This part of the research process involved going beyond being reflexive because the focus was not on me reflecting on me, but rather me reflecting on a First Nations Elder, using my questions to reflect back at me. This process was one of refraction, which added nuance to the self-study research methodology and was a surprising outcome of the project. Therefore, I labelled this new methodological approach the ‘Refractive Reconciliatory Self-study’ (RRS).

#### ***7.2.3.1 Ten principles of the RRS research method***

An RRS in a research project can only occur within the bounds of a respectful, long-term relationship between colleagues or friends. As a form of self-study, RRS is a reflexive way of exploring work practices within an educational research environment that is within a ‘third space’. It can only occur when one participant is a member of the majority population and the other is a member of a minority group, and there must also have been a history of conflict between the two groups—but not necessarily between the individuals. The member of the minority group will have had the experience of being wronged and ‘othered’ and crucially, both people need to already have been proactive, experienced participants in some form of a



reconciliation process between the two groups. It is this ongoing commitment to enacting or exploring some form of reconciliation that is the common strong thread shared by both parties.

The key part of RRS is the interview itself, although the preparation and follow-up are also important. The following ten principles form more than just the philosophy for this method of self-study. For the researcher—from the majority settler community—who plans to use the RRS method, these principles serve as directives and a guide for how to conduct an RRS. All principles must be satisfied for RRS to be enacted:

*Principle 1:* You must have an established, long-term working relationship with the person you wish to approach for the RRS.

*Principle 2:* Both people need to have deep, long-lived experience and understanding of the topic to be explored.

*Principle 3:* Your colleague has expressed spontaneous, unsolicited support and interest in your research prior to you broaching the subject of them partnering you in an RRS.

*Principle 4:* If the self-study is to be done within the context of a work place, interactions with your colleague must not be professionally detrimental or problematic for them.

*Principle 5:* You have explicit endorsement from another senior person or recognised Elder from the minority group who has authority in the academy (e.g., your supervisor), while planning and before you approach anyone to request participation in the RRS.

*Principle 6\*:* There is an explicit understanding and evidence of reciprocity as part of your relationship. Gratitude is expressed by the researcher to their colleague for their contribution to the project.

*Principle 7:* If your colleague agrees to partner with you in an RRS, allow time (a minimum of a few weeks) between when they express interest and verbal consent and a follow-up time to confirm their participation, prior to the interview–conversation.

*Principle 8:* The intention to conduct an RRS is indicated in your ethics application, but it can only ever be expressed as an ‘intention’ because it may not be actualised. You should be

prepared to use another form of self-study or reflective process that is suited to your research design.

*Principle 9:* Before an RRS interview takes place, ethics processes and research protocols must be followed, including the signing of consent forms. Your RRS partner is provided with a copy of the transcript and can edit any words attributed to them.

*Principle 10:* During and in the follow-up of the RRS interview, practice refractive reflexivity, which includes memo writing, reflecting and debriefing with ‘wise others’, and most importantly, practice deep listening.

\* For further explanations of Principle 6, see the Looking Forward Project, led by A/Prof Michael Wright, which defined ‘meaningful relationships’ as requiring people to be trustworthy, inclusive, adaptable and reciprocal. These four attributes were developed with First Nation Elders and service providers. Wright et al. (2013) argued that these attributes were ‘essential for our research method of ‘working together’, as they allow us to maintain the engagement process and protocols for the research project’ (as cited in Wright et al., 2016, pp. 87–88).

### ***7.2.3.2 Implications for current practice***

The RAP documents initiated and shaped the policy ethnography. These documents led to the interviews as a critical aspect of the research design, which in turn led to the need for a First Nations interviewee to witness the interviewer – me – attempting to be reflexive and enacting reconciliation. Thus, this new version of a self-study research method that evolved was crucial to the completion of this policy ethnography. The RRS is based on principles that are grounded in respectful, ongoing relationship and as such, attempt to mirror elements of Indigenous rights-based reconciliation in a university. Using the RRS not only elicits rich data, it will most importantly work towards enacting the reconciliation process it explores.

Finally, whatever happens in terms of the final research design, RRS must involve listening to Reconciliation Elders within the context of that group and their voices should be given prominence in the sharing of findings.

## **7.3 Limitations and constraints**

### **7.3.1 Moment-in-time, sample size and potential ‘wickedity’**

There were two interrelated limitations or constraints in the study: first, only four universities and their RAPs and 30 individuals contributed data to this project; and second, the data have been assessed at only one point in history. The dynamic nature of the reconciliation process means that analyses and conclusions need to be qualified. These limitations suggest that evaluating reconciliation in universities with a view to suggesting the best ways forward, could be seen as a wicked problem because it is something that cannot be completely resolved or achieved to everyone’s satisfaction. Reconciliation is a process in which ‘there can be no ultimate solution, since any resolution generates further issues and where solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time’ (Brown et al., 2010, p. 4). However, this project’s analyses and ensuing recommendations suggest, there *are* actions that could go towards creating a more reconciled, just way of being in Australian universities.

### **7.3.2 Time taken to complete thesis**

The final limitation is that this research was completed over a period of more than six years and the interviews were conducted at a particular moment-in-time. Some of the interview data were four years old by the time I was ready to submit this thesis, and therefore it is noted that the opinions of some of the participants may have changed. I was in contact with participants during 2017 and asked them whether they wanted to review any of their contributions but all were happy with what they had said. Additionally, as I was doing a policy ethnography, I went back to the policy, which were the RAPs and re-analysed the data in context of recent developments and related literature, but there was no scope to return to participants again.

## **7.4 Recommendations and suggestions for further research**

There may still be people who do not consider a commitment to reconciliation within Australian universities to be important, let alone within the broader population. As Prof Ian Anderson commented to me:

There is a very big global challenge to really connect up other groups around the reconciliation agenda, which says that in some way, the reconciliation movement has tapped into middle-class elites. That's the group who are most actively engaged and there are other groups in society who are still not there yet.

The evidence from this research proposes that there are positive possibilities for embracing and meeting that 'big global challenge' and that the current 'middle-class elites' in the universities' could engage and lead those who are 'not there yet'. Rights-based reconciliation can be enhanced and normalised if non-Indigenous and Indigenous people find more innovative ways to work together in shaping higher education for the future.

This optimism is cautioned by Matthews and Aberdeen (2008), who noted that 'the popular discourse promotes the view that "we/Australians" are surrounded on all sides by the engulfing tide of "threats to national security" and "new evils" variously labelled refugees, illegals, terrorists, foreigners and even peace activists' (p. 89). However, I am then encouraged because they concluded hopefully, that similar to a key finding of my research, reconciliation could and should be explored as it 'invokes the ongoing, constant and fundamental reworking of what we know about ourselves, our place and our country' (Matthews & Aberdeen, 2008, p. 95). Universities are the places where future teachers, health workers and many other professions are educated, so if universities were able to do this well, the transformation into a more reconciled, more inclusive wider community would hopefully follow.

Based on this research, along with the UNDRIP-related prerequisite that 'Aboriginal people must define the nature and scope of Aboriginal higher education, in an ever-changing social and political terrain' (Holt & Morgan, 2016, p. 104) and hence remain central to university reconciliation conversations, I make the following recommendations to the university sector:

- Policymakers and researchers should discuss and assess reconciliation in universities using SWIT to help provide focus and to determine if they require a plan, whether it is a RAP or maybe as part of the university's strategic plan, to articulate and promote reconciliation.
- The findings indicate that First Nations and their knowledges are essential to the future of Australia's universities. Therefore, First Nations researchers, with support from NATSIHEC, must be involved in the compilation of significant futurist reports

(e.g., by companies such as KPMG and E&Y) about and for Australian universities and higher education more broadly.

- Non-Indigenous researchers could consider using the RRS when they conduct research related to reconciliation.
- Research should be undertaken to examine differences in universities with RAPs compared to those that do not have them to provide further insights into reconciliation in the sector.
- Universities should support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and find ways to enact it within their domain. This may include addressing ideas of sovereignty with their local First Nations. Universities should also seek advice and endorsement from NATSIHEC when having such conversations.
- Universities ensure that reconciliation-related work is explicitly valued, given prominence and workload and positioned separately from work done in equity and diversity areas.
- NATSIHEC and Reconciliation Elders (such as those whom I identified in this project) should confer about how reconciliation could be addressed in the sector.
- Universities seeking to work on reconciliation activities outside of their sector, should consider developing partnerships with Reconciliation Australia. The overall lack of university engagement with RAPs over the years suggests that there may be opportunities for further discussions.
- For Australian universities with offshore locations, often in places with their own First Peoples, a further rich area for exploration is how the concept of Reconciliation can co-exist or be interpreted alongside the Australian experience.
- Australian universities collaborate with Canadian universities that are explicitly exploring their version of formal reconciliation to compare and enable good practice, which would be beneficial to both countries. Since the TRC of Canada released their report in 2015, there has been significant activity by Canadian scholars to understand how universities address the recommendations (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b, p. 2).

## 7.5 Final words

The phrase that ‘if we scratch a theory we find a biography’ (Torres, 1998, p. 111) is particularly true for this thesis. In writing about this part of the Australian reconciliation story, I am indebted to the many good people who have spoken to me and the many more, whose words and ideas I have built upon and cited.

The principal question that I commenced this project with was: What does the idea of Reconciliation look like in Australian universities and how has it been articulated through RAPs? I began with a focus on formal big ‘R’ reconciliation within universities and inevitably, intertwined with this process, was small ‘r’ reconciliation. By choosing a policy ethnography methodology, I was able to use the RAPs as pivot points to further explore the concept by listening to people share their wisdom and to add my self-study.

At the beginning of the thesis, I included the explanation for Reconciliation provided by Patrick Dodson, and now, before I close with words from his brother, Michael Dodson, I acknowledge the generous, wise people who I interviewed for this study, many of whom I would call Reconciliation Elders. To the First Nations people who work, or have recently worked, in and with universities, including those whom I listened to: Ian Anderson, Tom Calma, Michael Dodson, Simon Forrest, Marion Kickett, Leanne Holt, Anita Lee Hong, John Maynard, Darryl Monaghan, Jeannie Morrison, Charles O’Leary, Peter Radoll, Amber Roberts, and David Tyrell, I am grateful for their perseverance with the often bureaucratically intransigent and incidentally racist structures that shape our universities. I also gratefully acknowledge the non-Indigenous people who expressed their commitment to reconciliation and shared stories with me: Richard Baker, Fred Chaney, Ellen Day, Jill Downie, Margo Eden, Michele Fleming, Beena Giridharan, Tamai Hilton, Jane den Hollander, Richard James, Linda Lilly, Dallas McGann, Beth Parkin, Amy Seath and Cheryl Stickels.

The final sage words spoken by Reconciliation Elder, Michael Dodson at the end of our interview time, reminded me that the reconciliation I had been researching, is alive, always evolving and that at the crux of it was and always will be, right relationships and hope:

Reconciliation's a bit like that—looking after relationships from generation to generation. We're not going to set something in place now that's going to satisfy the next generation—my daughters'—their generation. They've got a few different ideas about how things ought to be done, so don't deny them the chance by trying to think that we can; that reconciliation is something we can tick a box against because that's not what's going to happen. It shouldn't be a thing that we make a song and dance about. Reconciliation as it occurs progressively through generations should be unremarkable. It should be, well, this is how each generation does this! It started way back in 1990 by people we don't even remember, but they started something that is now the custom; the way in which we do things in Australia. This is part of our national way of looking after each other. That's what reconciliation ought to be, in my view. And if thinking changes on this, it mustn't. It can't. Reconciliation's not something that you can put in a box and wrap up and tie a ribbon around. It's not that. It's a gift that you're constantly unwrapping. Okay?

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## 9. Appendices

### 9.1 Appendix A: Interview Questions—Version 1



#### **Project: The Idea of Reconciliation and its Actualisation in Australian Universities**

1. How long have you been engaged in activities or work associated with Reconciliation?
2. Can you tell me something about the first time you became engaged in this space? Do you have a story that comes to mind about that time?
3. How do you define 'Reconciliation'?
4. What do you think is the main purpose of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)?
5. What do you think is the main purpose of the RAP at <insert name> university?
6. Do you know why <insert name> university has a RAP?
  - a. If yes, tell me something about this story.
7. What is your role/connection to this RAP and how do you feel about it?
8. Which university documents, if any, is your institution's RAP connected to?
  - a. What about any state/national/international documents?
9. All universities have stated values. What values does this RAP capture?
10. How do you think a RAP relates to Reconciliation?
11. Do you think the RAP has any connection to education? If yes, why? If not, why not?
12. Some people talk about the need for anti-racism education in our schools and universities. What are your thoughts about this?
  - a. Do you think the RAP could be considered as anti-racism education? Why/why not?
13. Has your current RAP changed since the initial one was introduced?
  - a. What do you know about this?
14. Who is ultimately responsible for the RAP at your university?
15. Are there people who have activities specifically associated with administering the RAP in their workload? Provide details if possible.
16. Are Indigenous people at the university involved in the RAP? If they are, what is the evidence of their involvement? If not, why not?
17. What do you think is the future of the RAP at <insert name> university?
18. What do you think is the future of RAPs more broadly?
19. What are your feelings or thoughts about Reconciliation at this moment in history?
20. What do you think is the future of Reconciliation in this country?

## 9.2 Appendix B: Cover Pages of first RAPs



## 9.3 Appendix C: Explanatory statement for interviewees



### EXPLANATORY STATEMENT for Interviewees

Research Project: The Idea of Reconciliation and its Actualisation in Australian Universities

Project Number: CF14/2667 – 2014001454

#### Contacts:

<b>Veronica Goerke (PhD Candidate)</b>	A/Prof Zane Ma Rhea
Phone: mb: 0417 976667 wk: (08)92663233	Phone: (03)99052823
Email: vgoe2@student.monash.edu.au	Email: zane.marhea@monash.edu

Dear XXXX

I am inviting you to take part in my project. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

#### What the research project involves

This research aims to assess the impact of **Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)** and the **Reconciliation** process more broadly in your workplace. The findings should provide insights into local, and national, engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people engaged in Reconciliation activities. This in turn should give the researchers opportunities to create strategies and tools that will have both local and global application for educational institutions in countries with First Nations peoples.

To this end, I would like to interview you (~60 – 90 minutes), either face-to-face, via telephone or online. There will either be an audio recording or a video recording of the interview, depending on what you prefer.

#### Why you were chosen for this research

I am approaching you because you have been involved in some way with a university RAP and the reconciliation process. In researching one of the RAPs I have obtained your contact information from either your university website, another public website, or another participant has indicated your significance to this RAP and you have contacted me.

#### Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

To show your consent in this interview you will need to sign a Consent Form. Even after you have signed the Consent Form, and up to the time of publication of articles and papers associated with the dissertation (approximate publication date is June 30, 2016), you have the right to withdraw your contribution. If you withdraw your consent, any recording or transcript, or part thereof, will be destroyed.

I will send you a copy of your interview transcript (and film footage if you agreed to being filmed). You will then have one month (30 days) to request any edits to the transcript, including requests to de-identify any sections. After that time, I will assume I can use your transcript as is.

#### Possible benefits and risks to participants

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research. However, it is possible that if you make a negative comment associated with an organisation, you may expose yourself to a negative response

from that organisation. I cannot predict this but if you have any concerns at any time you can ask that I either de-identify that comment, or not use it in my thesis. It is likely that if you agree to participate in this project, you are interested in the reconciliation process and are keen to share your insights. Your participation may assist you to further clarify what reconciliation and RAPs mean to you.

#### Confidentiality

If you agree to an interview, be aware that your comments will be identifiable. If, however, you wish to participate and request anonymity – perhaps for specific comments – then every effort will be made to de-identify that part of your contribution.

#### Storage of data

Identifiable data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet on Monash University premises for a period of 5 years, in accordance with Monash University regulations. Unless you indicate otherwise on your Consent Form, this includes the destruction of the data at the end of that time. Data will be protected by password access and in a locked Monash University office. It will also only be accessed by the researchers involved in this project. Participants will only have access to the data collected about themselves.

#### Use of data for other purposes

The findings for this project will be used for the PhD thesis and work and publications associated with that thesis. If you give consent, a recording of your interview may be offered to the *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* (AIATSIS) or another library. If your contribution is to be used this way, it will only be done with your full consent and clearly stated on your Consent Form.

#### Results

All participants will be notified of and given access to a summary of the final thesis and any publications that may result from the project. The participants are also free to contact the researchers at any time to request a copy of any findings.

#### Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer  
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)  
Room 111, Building 3e  
Research Office  
Monash University VIC 3800  
Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu) Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Thank you

**Veronica Goerke**  
(PhD Candidate)

## 9.4 Appendix D: Interviewee consent form



### INTERVIEWEE CONSENT FORM

#### Research Project Title: The Idea of Reconciliation and its Actualisation in Australian Universities

Chief Investigator: Ms Veronica Goerke (PhD Candidate)

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University, Doctor of Philosophy research project named above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
1. Audio recording during the interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Video recording during the interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The data I provide during this research may be used by Veronica Goerke in future projects associated with this topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I am aware that my contribution may be identifiable as coming from me; however, as noted in the Explanatory Statement, I have the option to request anonymity for parts of my contribution.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I will be sent a copy of the transcript and will have one month (30 days) to request edits to the transcript. After that time, the transcript can be used as is.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I will notify the researcher if I wish to withdraw permission, even after I have signed this form (and up to the time of publication – approximately September 30, 2016 – of articles and papers associated with the dissertation).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The data I provide for this research may be retained for longer than the usual 5 year period at the <i>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)</i> or at  _____  _____  (details of alternative place of storage)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

Project Number: CF14/2667 – 2014001454 | V. M. GOERKE [Student ID: 23721537]



## 9.5 Appendix E: Interview Questions—Version 2



### Guiding Interview Questions [Version 2]

Research project: The Idea of Reconciliation and its Actualisation in Australian Universities

1. Please **introduce yourself**, in the context of our meeting today and tell me something about who you are.
2. **How long** have you been engaged in activities or work associated with Reconciliation?
3. Can you tell me something about the **first time** you became engaged in this space? Do you have a story that comes to mind about that time?
4. **TODAY**, how do you **define 'Reconciliation'**?
5. Onto Reconciliation Action Plans or RAPs: What do you think is the **main purpose** of a RAP?
6. What do you think is the main **purpose of the RAP at here**?
7. Do you know **why** <insert name> university has a RAP?
  - a. If yes, tell me something about this story.
8. What is **your role/connection to the RAP** and how do you feel about it?
9. Which university documents, is/should this RAP connected to?
  - a. (If relevant) How does R, and your RAP work in this university's transnational education environment?
10. Who do is ultimately responsible for the RAP here? **Who do you think should drive a RAP in a university?**
11. Are there people who have activities specifically associated with administering the RAP in their workload?
12. How do you think a **RAP relates to Reconciliation**?
13. Do you think the **RAP has any connection to education**? If yes, why? If not, why not?
14. Do you think the **RAP has anything to do with anti-racism education**? Why/why not?
15. What do you think is the future of the RAP here?
16. **Not all universities have RAPs, and not all will renew their current RAPs. Why do you think this is so?**
17. What do you think is the **future of RAPs** more broadly?
18. What are your **feelings or thoughts** about **Reconciliation at this moment** in history?
19. What do you think is the **future of Reconciliation in this country**?
20. Other comments



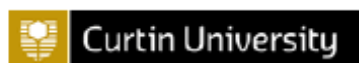
## 9.6 Appendix F: Curtin RAP Summit, 2013



FURTHER INFORMATION  
Website: [http://kards.curtin.edu.au/about\\_us/rap.cfm](http://kards.curtin.edu.au/about_us/rap.cfm)  
RAP FACILITATOR:  
Ms Veronica Goerke Phone: 08 9266 3233  
Email: [V.Goerke@curtin.edu.au](mailto:V.Goerke@curtin.edu.au)



FURTHER INFORMATION  
Email: [rap@reconciliation.org.au](mailto:rap@reconciliation.org.au) Phone: 02 6273 9200  
Website: [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)



### Reconciliation Action Plan WA Summit 2013

**Big organisations sharing big ideas about a big plan**

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2013, 1.30pm to 4.30pm  
Hosted by Curtin University with Reconciliation Australia  
Council Chambers, Building 100  
Refreshments available from 1.00pm



Program for the Reconciliation Action Plan WA Summit 2013: <i>Big organisations sharing big ideas about a big plan</i>		
Introduction: 1.30 pm to 2.00 pm		
1.30 – 2.00	Welcome by Host	Professor Jill Downie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education, Curtin University
	Welcome to Country	Associate Professor Simon Forrest Director, Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University
	Welcome to Curtin	Professor Jeanette Hackett Vice-Chancellor, Curtin University
	Setting the scene	Reka Upward Projects Officer, Reconciliation Australia
Summit sessions: 2.00pm to 4.00 pm		
2.00 – 2.20	Achievements	What is one RAP success related to employment, education or research targets and how did you achieve it?
2.20 – 2.40	Hurdles	What has been one RAP challenge you have experienced while implementing your targets related to employment, research or education?
2.40 – 2.50	Surprises	Have you experienced an unexpected outcome connected to a RAP target in the area of employment, research activities or education and training?
2.50 – 3.45	Aspirations	What is one RAP hope or aspiration your organisation has related to your future RAP targets?
3.55 – 4.00	Final words	The Hon Fred Chaney AO, Board member, Reconciliation Australia
Afternoon tea and networking: 4.00 pm to 4.30 pm		
Forum outcomes	<b>1. More ideas for participants' subsequent local RAP targets related to research, education and/or employment</b> <b>2. The intention from participants to follow-up with each other during the year to determine practical outcomes, or the making of new links with each other, to achieve Outcome 1</b>	

## 9.7 Appendix G: Ethics approval



Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)  
Research Office

### Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

**Project Number:** CF14/2667 - 2014001454  
**Project Title:** The Idea of Reconciliation and its Actualisation in Australian Universities  
**Chief Investigator:** Assoc Prof Mary Lou Rasmussen  
**Approved:** From: 30 September 2014 To: 30 September 2019

*Terms of approval - Failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.*

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel): Require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. Future correspondence: Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. Annual reports: Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. Final report: A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. Monitoring: Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. Retention and storage of data: The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nip Thomson".

Professor Nip Thomson  
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Mr Peter Anderson, Ms Veronica Goerke

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia  
Building 3E, Room 111, Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton  
Telephone +61 3 9905 5490 Facsimile +61 3 9905 3831  
Email [muhrec@monash.edu](mailto:muhrec@monash.edu) <http://www.monash.edu.au/researchoffice/human/>  
ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C