

**INDIGENOUS ISSUES
IN
AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES**
Research, Teaching, Support

Editors

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And now we have the intervention mob: upholding the principles of ethical research in a complex research environment

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Introduction

Australian schools have undergone enormous changes in recent years, which have impacted on the ways in which schools are led, managed and operated. These changes call for the further enhancing of educational leaders' skills and capacities, not just to cope with their changing roles and responsibilities, but to also deal with tensions created by these changes. Put into a remote Aboriginal context in the Northern Territory (NT), many of these changes have emanated from government policies—not all to do with education, but nevertheless having impact on schooling—as well as philosophies and views, that have ranged, historically, from assimilation to the current federal government's 'Intervention' policy.

Linking Worlds: Strengthening the leadership capacity of Indigenous educational leaders in remote education settings is a four-year research project funded by the Australian Research Council and awarded in 2005. The *Linking Worlds* project aims to:

redefine educational leadership as applied to remote Indigenous communities through the process of identifying and analysing the various dimensions that relate to it ... [and also] ...to establish the role and relationship of the educational leader with respect to constructing Indigenous cultural identity and social well-being (d'Arbon, Frawley and Richardson, p.8).

The project brings together the concerns for enhancing Aboriginal educational leadership and the research interests of the Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership at Australian Catholic University (ACU), and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) as research partners, and the collaborating organisations of the Australian Principals' Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC), Catholic Education Darwin (CEO NT), and the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NT DET).

Researchers had just begun to collect data in a number of remote NT Aboriginal communities when the then Coalition federal government announced its 'intervention' into a number of these communities. This chapter deals with the research issues faced by the researchers, and their reactions and application to the *Linking Worlds* project.

The Intervention

Under the pretext of responding to a report into child abuse in some Aboriginal communities—the *Little Children are Sacred* report (Wild & Anderson 2007)—the then Coalition federal government introduced into Australian Parliament, in August 2007, a package of five Bills that resulted in 'a comprehensive, compulsory intervention in 73 Northern Territory Aboriginal communities' (Brennan 2007). The Bills included measures to abolish the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP); quarantine 50% of community members' welfare payments, and 100% of those whose children are truant; deploy Australian Federal Police as 'special constables' to the Northern Territory Police Force; remove the permit system which governs access to Aboriginal land; acquire five-year leases over prescribed townships that are part of the emergency response; and negotiate with interested communities on 99-year township leases. Brennan (2007) stated 'it was law-making at Canberra's worst' and that:

when Government does not have recourse to an elected Aboriginal consultative body, when the Government controls the Senate, and when there is an election in the air with an Opposition that refuses to be wedged on non-economic policy issues, there is little prospect of close parliamentary scrutiny of bold new policy proposals for Aboriginal well-being emanating from Canberra.

What it meant on the ground was that a significant proportion of people on CDEP in every community were uncertain about how they would gain income with the removal of the scheme. They also had to cope with hundreds of uninvited non-Aboriginal people entering their communities (government appointed 'business managers, army, police, welfare agents, nurses, doctors) resulting in, in most cases, high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. It also meant, from the *Linking Worlds* project perspective, that there was a need to reflect on the project's presence in these communities and to review ethical protocols to elicit communities' wishes and priorities.

A brief history of remote NT Aboriginal community schools

Aboriginal principals have been working in remote NT schools for decades, especially since the 1980s with the majority of them trained through BIITE. The history of remote NT Aboriginal community schools highlights the enormous changes that have occurred in a relative short time, in some cases, barely 50 years. The NT system of community-based education had its origins during World War Two. Up to this period, the Commonwealth Government, which had responsibility for the NT, had made no coordinated attempt to address the educational needs of Aboriginal people, although several religious missions had in place some limited primary school education, albeit of a restrictive and indoctrinating nature. Some of these included the religious schools established by the Church Missionary Society in Arnhem Land (Austin 1998) and the Catholic Missions on Bathurst Island, Daly River, Port Keats and Santa Teresa (Gsell 1956). There were, also, several so-called 'part-Aboriginal' institutions such as the Bungalow in Alice Springs, and the Kahlin Compound in Darwin, which provided basic education. Prior to the war there had been a number of conferences to discuss the development of more positive Aboriginal policy, but apart from the 1936 conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers agreeing to have regular conferences on the issue (Giese 1969), nothing else much happened.

As a consequence of the war the Australian Defence Forces (ADF) established sites near Aboriginal settlements throughout the Northern Territory including Milikapiti and Cape Fourcroy in the Tiwi Islands, Yirrkala and Milingimbi, as well as the major towns of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin (Giese 1969). Many Aboriginal people were employed by the ADF as labourers and had active roles in the defence of northern Australia. Because of the contributions being made by Aboriginal people to the war effort in the Northern Territory, the Director of Native Affairs EWP Chinnery requested Major WC Groves to 'make recommendations for the educational development and welfare of the natives of the Northern Territory in connection with their present association with the Army' (F1/0 1949/420). In his report Groves made recommendations on the way in which the Army could, in the future, organise its settlements for Aboriginal personnel and provide for the educational needs of Aboriginal people residing in these Army settlements. Groves recommended that 'educational activities' fit into the organisation and administration of settlements (F1/0 1949/420), but with the end of the war, this report was soon forgotten and the situation reverted to the pre-war status quo.

By 1948, funds for the construction of schools, schoolteachers' residences and school equipment on seven settlements under the control of the Native Affairs Branch (NAB) had been approved, although not allocated (Ford 1998). In 1950, the Commonwealth Office of Education (COE) signed an agreement with the Administrator of the Northern Territory giving it the responsibility for the administration and management of Aboriginal education, with infrastructure being the responsibility of the Northern Territory Administration (NTA). Schools

were established at Bagot, Delissaville (Belyuen), the Bungalow and Yuendumu (NTRS 1622) in addition to the twelve mission schools at Roper River, Oenpelli, Angurugu, Bathurst Island, Port Keats, Arltunga, Goulburn Island, Elcho Island, Milingimbi, Yirrkala, Hermannsburg and Umbakumba (Giese 1969). A draft curriculum had been developed in 1949, trialled and then reviewed at a teachers' conference in 1953. The curriculum 'was prescriptive and divided into small designated components of information to be taught as separate units' (Ford 1998, p. 308).

Responsibilities for Aboriginal education remained with the Welfare Branch until 1973, when it was disbanded and the Commonwealth Department of Education assumed control. In December 1972 the Whitlam Government launched its policy of self-determination, which included a campaign to have children living in communities given primary education in community languages. By 1973 a programme of bilingual education was launched in a number of schools in the Northern Territory. Experimental programs were initially introduced into five government schools in Northern Territory communities. This grew to 20 schools in 1977. During this period a number of Aboriginal Assistant teachers were trained, and in 1975 the third year of the Darwin Community College's course for Assistant Aboriginal teachers was moved to Batchelor. In 1978, the Northern Territory was granted self-government and the first Aboriginal Principal, Kevin Rogers, was appointed at Ngukurr. In 1979, the Commonwealth transferred education to the Northern Territory Government.

NT DET's 2008 snapshot of Aboriginal education states that there are now 985 Aboriginal communities with 188 schools (152 public and 36 private schools) and 51 homeland learning centres. Of these schools, 119 are located outside of Alice Springs and Darwin. Similarly, 70% of Aboriginal students are located outside of Alice Springs and Darwin, and 39% of students in the Northern Territory are from an ESL background with more than three quarters of these students being Aboriginal. The NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service has registered 104 Indigenous languages and dialects.

The work of remote Aboriginal school principals is now more complex due to government involvement in school management and school curriculum. In the NT this occurred through a government policy *Towards the 90s: Excellence, Accountability and Devolution* which aimed to devolve management functions to school councils. These school-based management models of operation resulted in changing roles and responsibilities for educational leaders. One major change is the way in which schools are expected to be led, managed and operated by school-based educational leaders. Decisions that were once made in central and regional offices are now 'the province of their communities' (Cranston 2002, p.2).

Educational leadership research in remote Aboriginal communities

Research into Aboriginal educational leadership remains limited, although in the past few years there have been a few developments. Likewise, there has been very little cross-cultural comparative research which, according to Walker & Dimmock (2002), needs to be addressed because as long as 'the bulk of theory and practice in the field is drawn almost exclusively from narrowly conceived Anglo-American beliefs, philosophies and understandings, our understandings in the field of educational administration and leadership will remain partial and incomplete' (p. 199).

Nolen's (1998) research Masters thesis is one of only two studies dealing specifically with educational leadership in remote NT Aboriginal communities – the other is the current *Linking Worlds* project. Nolen's field research was conducted in five remote NT Aboriginal schools, but also included interviews with staff from BIITE, NT DET, CEO NT, and people in church leadership positions. Her thesis outlines a number of leadership models, which have emerged in remote Aboriginal schools across the Northern Territory. She argues that 'there is no one 'best' way of exercising educational leadership in remote communities because of the unique nature and set of historical circumstances existing within each community' (Nolen 1998, p. 5).

Nolen (1998, p. 150) believes that 'leadership and management can be exercised in different ways' and that – at the time of her research – 'flexibility exists within present school structures under devolution processes for schools to plan, organise and implement structures and programs which suit the circumstances of their particular communities'. Her research shows that a:

number of schools are establishing patterns of group leadership to accommodate the demands which are placed on Aboriginal people in educational leadership as they strive to fulfil their cultural and family obligations as well as meet the demands arising from their positions within the school (p. 150).

A further piece of research that addressed Indigenous educational leadership was that of Wicks (1999), although this did not specifically focus only on NT remote Indigenous schools. Wicks's research was a comparative study of educational leadership in Indigenous schools in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, including remote NT schools, and sought common themes and theories of leadership that were valued in these contexts. His focus on the values underpinning the purposes of education in each site, as well as the values used by educational leaders to justify their actions, revealed common themes across all sites. These themes emphasised indigenous world-views and their epistemologies; 'most conspicuous among them was the importance of the local culture and the role of the school and the principal in reproducing and maintaining that culture' (Wicks 1999, p. 18).

The research design

Apart from Nolen's and Wicks's research, there is a dearth of literature on Aboriginal educational leadership in remote communities, which is at odds with the current political focus on educational outcomes for Aboriginal students across all tiers of education. The purpose of *Linking Worlds* project is to build on this research in order to determine what factors influence and impact on educational leadership in remote Aboriginal communities, and how this understanding might assist in strengthening the leadership capacity of educational leaders. It is anticipated that *Linking Worlds* will lead to an improved understanding of the relationships between systems, schools and remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (d'Arbon *et al.* 2005).

The conceptual framework of this qualitative study includes the exploration of a range of interrelated issues – educational, cultural, managerial, and administrative – in the sphere of Indigenous educational leadership in remote settings. The study endeavours to explore how a range of stakeholders, including the major employers of Indigenous teachers, NT DET, and CEO NT, as well as the main Indigenous teacher training institution, BIITE, define effective Indigenous educational leadership in these settings. The study also investigates the expectations that education systems and remote Indigenous communities have of Aboriginal educational leaders in terms of their role and responsibilities.

The research design for this project is informed by a number of principles articulated by the Indigenous Research Reform Agenda (IRRA) (Henry *et al.* 2002). IRRA's review highlighted several points, which have been in the past, and continue to be, endorsed by key bodies such as the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and are also evident in ACU's and BIITE's research ethics guidelines. *Linking Worlds* is based on three broad principles of ethical research: (a) consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding; (b) respect, recognition and involvement; and, (c) benefits, outcomes and agreement. The way in which Aboriginal people are centrally positioned in the research process underpins *Linking Worlds*, and this calls for direct involvement by Aboriginal educational leaders as key players in the research activity and actively seeking and listening to their advice on issues of concern.

Linking Worlds informants are drawn from remote Aboriginal community schools and consist of qualified Aboriginal teachers or Aboriginal teachers who are currently undertaking training, and non-Aboriginal teachers who have, or had, significant experience in leadership roles in remote community schools. *Linking Worlds*, at its beginning, was viewed as occurring over four cycles, with each cycle based on Participative Action Research (PAR) cycles of planning, acting, analysing and reflecting activities. Action Research has been described as a family of research methodologies (Dick 1999) characterised by the simultaneous pursuit of action and research that occurs through a planning, acting, analysing and reflecting cycle. The core concept of PAR—one in the family of action research methodologies—is that ‘it changes the research process away from a process of an expert researching on to a joint process of researching with’ (Ramsay 2000).

Each research cycle involved and consulted Aboriginal participants. In Cycle One *Linking Worlds* project team met to plan the research project, to define and describe the research question, to develop the research instrument and to define roles and responsibilities of all involved in *Linking Worlds*. This meant that the Chief Investigators (CIs), the Australian Postdoctoral Industry Fellows (APDI), the Associate Researcher (AR) and the Australian Postgraduate Award Industry (APA) PhD students understood what was expected of them during the life of the project. It also meant that the Collaborating Organisations had tangible input into the planning functions including setting up the *Linking Worlds* structure, confirming the project personnel, determining the allocation of resources, making project location decisions, and confirming the stages of the project. During Cycle One the researchers, CIs, APDI and AR, commenced work in the field to explain the research process at individual school sites, discussed and planned the research methodology making adjustments where necessary, and facilitated focus group discussion or individual interviews. The *Linking Worlds* project team aimed for the first phase of data collection, Data Collection Package 1 (DCP1) to be implemented during this cycle. In Cycle Two the activities were to be repeated, the initial sites revisited with Data Collection Package 2 (DCP2) and the fieldwork expanded to more sites. In Cycle Three, sites were to be revisited and the fieldwork again expanded, with the researchers collecting and analysing data. In Cycle Four, research findings would be disseminated through a process of ongoing communication during the research process, and through the dissemination of Plain English and other non-academically oriented research products.

Data collection: the first attempt

During Term 1 (January to March) of the 2007 school year, *Linking Worlds* researchers visited a number of remote Aboriginal schools to provide information about the project and to implement the first phase of data collection. Researchers prepared a DCP1 folder, which contained a power-point presentation, overhead transparencies of the power-point slides, disposable cameras, information letters, and consent forms. The main DCP1 data collection methods consisted of a number of school-based hypothetical leadership scenarios, which were to be discussed in focus groups and a photo-voice activity based on the photos taken by the participants. For example, the ‘Working Together’ topic presented the following scenario:

Sandi and Maggie, the new Indigenous assistant teacher, have planned a cultural activity for just after lunch. With Sandi away sick, Maggie has to rely on some of the parents who have come to the school to help. The kids are divided into groups of boys and girls. Two Indigenous men take the boys for dancing, while the women take the girls. The boys have walked away with the men to the shade of some trees quite a distance from the school. The girls have stayed with the women in the school playground. Some of the non-Indigenous teachers go with the groups, others do not and spend the time planning. The activity lasts all afternoon.

The scenario discussions were to take place one afternoon a week over ten weeks during the first half of the school year. For the 'Working Together' example, the following questions informed the discussion:

What is your 'working together' story? You might want to discuss and write about:

- Who works together and why?
- How do you work together?
- When do you work together?
- How is kinship used in the school?
- Describe times when kinship obligations make working at school difficult?
- Describe times when kinship obligations make working at school positive?
- Describe how you manage kinship obligations and the demands of working in a school operating with western cultural rules, give some examples?

The photo-voice activity centred on participants taking photographs of educational leadership events, and then using selected photographs as prompts to talk about related issues. Researchers visited eight remote Aboriginal schools during Term One and conducted the DCP1 in-services.

During the second half of 2007, *Linking Worlds* researchers were to return to the schools to implement DCP2, which included checks of DCP1 data, photo-voice discussion and interviews. However, it soon became apparent that the research was receiving a subdued response with only one of the eight schools returning DCP1 data. A number of the researchers felt that the limited response was due, in part, to the action by the federal government in its intervention into remote Aboriginal communities. An email from one of the school principals to the researchers soon confirmed this: 'Sorry for not responding sooner but it's been busy, busy, busy. And now we have the intervention mob!'

Ethical research

Fasoli and James (2007), when describing research in Aboriginal communities, identify a number of 'rules' for conducting research. These they classify as 'official rules', 'institutional rules', and 'unspoken and unwritten rules'.

• Official rules

Official rules are the standard research rules set out by the peak Australian organisations of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). NHMRC (2007) have identified six core values as being important when conducting research in and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These are the values of 'reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity'. The NHMRC (2007) provides guidelines how these values should apply specifically in research to ensure research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence, and respect. The AIATSIS (2007, p. 2) guidelines 'include a statement of the principles of ethical research in Indigenous studies, followed by an explanation of each principle, accompanied by some practical applications ... [which] ... are not intended to be directive but are recommendations and suggestions to achieve the best standards of ethical research'. As stated earlier in the chapter, these three groups of ethical principles are: (i) consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding; (ii) respect, recognition and involvement; and, (iii) benefits, outcomes and agreement. For each of these principles the guidelines give advice, for example under the principle of 'respect' the guidelines advise: 'Obtain (do not assume) invitations to visit the community for the time necessary to conduct the research and to report upon results' (AIATSIS 2007, p. 7). Obtaining the right permission is essential because 'any person who trespasses on indigenous land risks endangering not only themselves, but also

the traditional land owners who have the obligation to protect the sacredness and integrity of their country' (ATSIC 1997, p.2).

Official rules are also those prescribed by Australian legislation. In the Northern Territory the applicable legislation is the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. The functions and responsibilities of the Land Councils are set out in this Act, one of which refers to entry onto Aboriginal land. Under Section 70 of the Act a person shall not enter or remain on Aboriginal land unless authorised, and so one of the statutory responsibilities and duties of Aboriginal land councils is to process applications for entry permits. The respectful and ethical procedure to follow if you want to enter Aboriginal land, for whatever reason, is to apply for a permit. The *Linking Worlds* project team acknowledged this in a brochure which was prepared for all communities and participants in which it was stated that 'the researchers will seek permission from Land Councils each time they wish to visit communities ... [and] at all times, the visiting researchers will obtain the correct permits and observe community protocols'. Some land councils have specific research permits, while others issue general permits. In addition to seeking entry permits, *Linking Worlds* researchers also sought research specific permission from the Northern Land Council (NLC) and the Central Land Council (CLC). The NLC requires researchers to complete a permit application which seeks information on a number of details, including benefits to traditional owners and intellectual property. Similarly, CLC also has a permit process in place for intending researchers based on a number of principles which:

seek to respect Aboriginal rights, culture and intellectual property by requesting that sufficient information is provided to Aboriginal people about projects; Aboriginal people are consulted about projects on their land; Aboriginal people can be involved in projects as far as is practical; agreements to protect cultural and intellectual property rights are made where appropriate, and project applicants obtain a permit for projects on Aboriginal land (CLC 2008).

• **Institutional rules**

Institutional rules are those set out by research institutions, in this case both ACU and BIITE who are joint partners in *Linking Worlds* and who both require ethical clearance within their own institutions. For ACU researchers, a comprehensive ethics approval process is part of any research that involves human participants. Prior to undertaking research an Ethics Application is submitted to the University's Human Research Ethics Committee for consideration. If the research involves Indigenous participants, the application must first be discussed with, and supported by, ACU's nominated Indigenous staff member. Researchers will protect the confidentiality of individual participants involved in the research, and the ethics approval process is a clear indication of this.

BIITE receives many requests from researchers to undertake research due to its all-Indigenous student body and its strong relationships with remote NT communities developed over its 35-year history. Gaining access to Indigenous research sites and participants is not as easy as it once was as Indigenous people have become tired of being exploited by less ethical researchers and have become more aware of their rights. This puts a special responsibility on BIITE to ensure that the research that takes place under its auspice is ethically sound and in the best interests of Indigenous participants.

BIITE's research ethics forms guide researchers to consider key issues in relation to their research intentions and assumptions and the consequences of these for Indigenous people. Researchers must justify their research in terms of overall benefit and risk to Indigenous people specifically and with particular attention to those expected to participate in the project. One question on the form asks the researcher to explain the degree of involvement in the research by Indigenous people, designed to signal this issue as an ethical priority. For many years, Indigenous people have been researched rather than afforded the opportunity to collaborate in

researching their own issues and concerns. BIITE's Research Ethics Committee gives priority to Internal Research Grant scheme applications that involve Indigenous people as co-researchers. A request for information about payment of Indigenous participants highlights another longstanding problem encountered by Indigenous people who have, over many years, been used by researchers for their expertise in languages, local contexts, local knowledge, community contacts and as traditional owners of the land, often without recognition or acknowledgement. One section of the form asks researchers to outline how and where the research findings will be disseminated providing examples of recommended plain language and less language dependent forms of communication (for example community meetings, seminars, journal articles, exhibitions, conference posters and presentations) to ensure that remote Indigenous participants with English as a second, third or fourth language are not disadvantaged. All of these procedures are provided to foster in researchers the need to consider issues highlighted by the NHMRC (2007) and AIATSIS (2007) guidelines described above.

Similarly, NT DET assesses all applications received to conduct research to ensure that projects address issues of strategic relevance to the goals of the organisation, maintain high ethical standards, are realistic and applicable. NT DET acknowledges the importance of research that contributes to the delivery of services that promote continuing improvement in Indigenous education, training and employment outcomes. CEO NT recognises that the nature and volume of requests received for research, particularly in schools, has significant implications for the efficient operation of work units and schools and the well-being of students and staff. Both NT DET and CEO NT require research projects to be coordinated to minimise disruption and that all research must have prior approval.

- **Spoken and unspoken rules**

Spoken and unspoken rules are the least obvious and most difficult for researchers to follow because they are never explicit and could go unheeded depending on the nature of the research culture developed by a research team. These kinds of rules require researchers to reflect non-judgmentally on setbacks, to hear what is not said as well as what is said, and to find the courage of their convictions as a way to decide how best to proceed.

For example, a member of the research team rang one of the communities after a long period of silence, hoping to hear that the DCP1 was going well if not nearly completed. The Indigenous leader with whom she had had most contact was currently working as the cleaner at the school. The cleaner explained that everyone in her small four-teacher school was 'very, very busy'. She talked about how they were implementing a new literacy program, making time for visits from education department staff providing maths in-services, preparing for the up coming Rural Show in which the school would be entering three projects, clearing up from a recent small flood that had seriously disrupted community activities, investigating the break-in by some youth who had stolen all of the cameras we'd given the school for photo-voice activities, and figuring out how to cover for the cook who was ill. She was adamant that everyone really wanted to do the research but it was just a bit busy right at the moment. Implicit in what she was saying was one of the unspoken rules: research will not be prioritised over other more pressing issues impacting on research participants lives.

This phone call occurred just prior to the 'Intervention' arriving in this community. At the next research team meeting the researchers discussed the fact that activities associated with the DCP1 were apparently not happening in many communities. A gloom descended on the group as they considered this reality. It would have been easy at this point to simply to blame the communities. However, the researchers began to talk about the 'Intervention', which was dominating every news broadcast and which had become the prime topic of conversation at BIITE as students told stories of its impact on their lives. The researchers began to wonder if they were asking too much of the schools they were working with. What had seemed like a useful school activity (DCP1) was seen in a new light. Was the research project becoming yet

another problematic 'obligation' for these community schools to handle? A new data collection method was needed.

The researchers began to talk about an alternative, one that would fit more conveniently (and less stressfully) into the lives of those with whom we were working. They talked about how to access participants in a context where they would be free to reflect on, rather than perform, leadership. It occurred to the researchers that, as an ARC Linkage project, *Linking Worlds* is built on collaboration amongst the research team, the employers of the research participants (NT DET and CEO NT) and a remote Indigenous schools advocacy group (APAPDC). These partners regularly brought remote Indigenous school participants from all over the NT into centralised workshops to undertake various professional development activities. The researchers thought that these workshops would offer a better space for thinking and reflecting on leadership. In addition, one of the researchers had used a metaphor activity as a data collection method in a previous project, and suggested that this might be a better approach in that it allowed participants to think about leadership in ways that could provide direct insights into their views on leadership.

Major changes to research methods can create anxiety amongst partners who have invested significant time and resources in a project. At one of the meetings of the research team with partner organisations, a partner asked the question, 'So what's going on? You've been doing this for a while? What have you found out?' This is another often unspoken rule: that research will provide something of practical value that can be used; however, the researchers were still at a stage where we were finding out, not reporting on findings.

Conclusion

The *Linking Worlds* project has provided an opportunity for the researchers to focus on the ethical principles of research. Humphrey (2000, p. 24) states that 'researchers are faced with the imperative of examining their own suppositions, actions and motivations, and of abiding by (at least on paper) a set of detailed ethical guidelines'. The challenge to research institutions is to apply these principles in a meaningful and tangible way, and for these principles to inform self-examination. In order for this to happen, research institutions must be active in a number of ways and for the *Linking World* researchers, this meant upholding the principles of ethical research.

Human Research Ethics Principles guide researchers' work and remind researchers to think about the participants' situation and their perspectives on the research. As a result of the government intervention, hundreds of uninvited non-Aboriginal people entered Aboriginal communities resulting in high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. The *Linking Worlds* researchers considered their own presence in these communities and acted according to ethical principles.

¹ This paper is a result of research and collaborative writing conducted within the *Linking Worlds* project. The Project investigates the work of Australian Indigenous educational leaders in remote community schools and has been funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) with support and assistance from the collaborating organisations of the Northern Territory Catholic Education Office, the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, and the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council. The research institutions are the Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). Of the authors, Lyn Fasoli is one of the Chief Investigators, and Jack Frawley is the Australian Postdoctoral Industry Fellow. The views expressed, however, are those of the authors and not those of the ARC or the named organisations. Tony d'Arbon from ACU, and Ms Robyn Ober from BIITE are also involved in the Project as Chief Investigator and Associate Researcher respectively.

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