White Questions—Black Answers:

Effective Inclusion of Indigenous Students with a Disability into Higher Education in Australia

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Abstract

Australian higher education has its roots deep in the soil of colonisation and European imperialism. Therefore, it has developed as a system that is exclusive rather than inclusive of social and cultural diversity. The poor levels of higher education participation and outcomes for Indigenous students and students with a disability indicate the need to examine current practices and their impact on Indigenous people with a disability. This study aimed to explore how the higher education sector can mitigate barriers faced by Indigenous students with a disability and scaffold their successful engagement with and outcomes in higher education.

Founded on Indigenous Standpoint Theory, as presented by Gilroy (2009a), the methodology of this research foregrounds the central role of Indigenous people with lived experience of disability—in the study design, its implementation and in the validation of the results. This research applied a mixed methods convergent parallel design. As described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the study involved collecting and analysing two distinct datasets. The Quantitative Track comprised an audit of Australian university websites and a review of Disability Action Plans to ascertain the nature of service delivery. The Qualitative Track comprised listening to the stories and truthtelling of five Indigenous people with a disability who had undertaken higher education in Australia. Following the collection and analysis of the unique datasets, a process of comparison and identifying relationships between the two Tracks was undertaken.

The study revealed the following six key findings:

1. Systemic barriers for Indigenous students with a disability were created by variable and bureaucratic institutional processes. Examples include the widespread requirement for

medical diagnosis of a disability before the provision of assistance and lack of flexibility in course design, delivery and assessment.

2. The Indigenous perspective of on disability was found to be a dual consideration with Indigenous students not presenting for disability support and Indigenous staff not accessing disability services and supports for their students.

3. Institutional supports for Indigenous students and students with a disability were siloed into different areas, creating a lack of clarity for Indigenous students regarding where to go for help and placing them at risk of missing out on services and supports available to non-Indigenous students.

4. Systems were not cognisant of the additional barriers faced by students who were both Indigenous and had a disability.

5. The ineffective transition from higher education to employment was a major frustration. Participants found themselves in a continuous loop of attempting further qualifications to improve their life opportunities.

6. There was a desire for and appreciation of supportive and respectful communications from support services. Further, a spirit of resilience, determination and the desire to succeed was observed in participants.

This study has identified a need for both public and private providers in the higher education sector to effectively coordinate their support services for Indigenous students with a disability. Within the current institutional funding model, this cohort may be better served by ensuring the following:

- Services are coordinated and easy to navigate within the institution.
- Students can present for supports without requiring supporting documentation to verify disability.

- All staff are committed to the principles of person-centredness to ensure that individual student needs are recognised and supported.
- Materials are produced following the principles of Universal Design of Learning to mitigate the need for students to declare that they have a disability.
- There is institutional commitment to cultural safety to ensure that knowledge of and respect for Indigenous culture, community and knowledge is embedded throughout all facets of the institution.

This thesis presents a framework to provide a pathway for institutions to achieve these desired outcomes and embed the processes in their Disability Action Plans.

Declaration of Originality

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Name: Sharon Ann Kerr

Date: February 26, 2021

Acknowledgement of Country and Knowledge

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this country, Australia, and all elders, past, present and future. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the knowledge that I am going to share—in particular, the input of my lead supervisor (Associate Professor Dr John Gilroy), the members of my Indigenous Advisory Group (Roslyn Sackley, Maria Robinson and Naomi Carolin), who continue to provide guidance and insight regarding Indigenous knowledge and cultural safety, and the people who have generously shared their stories.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the ongoing support provided by my supervisors: Associate Professor John Gilroy, Professor Emerita Patricia O'Brien and Professor Emeritus Trevor Parmenter. Their continued guidance, wisdom and dedication to research to improve the lives of people with a disability have provided me with inspiration, academic mentoring and friendship for life beyond this research.

Further, I would like to acknowledge my family—Luke, Ben, Joshua, Catherine, Charles and Samantha Kerr—who have shared me with this research. I would also like to thank my brother and sister-in-law Mr Mark and Mrs Sandy Mancq, Mr Peter and Ms Kelly Kerr, my mother Shirley, my dear friends Dr Susan and Mr Tony Bruck and Dr Stefan and Ms Nadia Tarnoveanu, for encouraging me throughout this journey.

Capstone Editing provided copyediting and proofreading services, according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national 'Guidelines for Editing Research Theses'.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, David Kerr BEc, LLB (Syd), my fellow traveller and advocate for equity of access and opportunity for people with a disability. His many achievements include successfully advocating for the Commonwealth Mobility Allowance for Australians with a disability. Since 1983 this scheme has paid an allowance to people with a disability to offset transport costs associated with engaging with work and voluntary activities. This and David's other achievements have inspired me to effect meaningful change.

Prologue

As a non-Aboriginal woman, I have come to this research following much reflection and due to a desire to improve access to education for Indigenous students with a disability. In 1981–1982, I attended the Milperra College of Advanced Education (CAE) and studied Social Welfare, majoring in drugs, alcohol and disability. At this time, Milperra CAE became the first higher education institution in New South Wales to initiate a support service for Aboriginal students.This experience allowed me to begin my lifelong learning path with formative friendships and a glimpse of the discrimination and barriers faced by Indigenous Australians. It also gave me the opportunity to study under Dr Margaret Sargent, a sociologist and writer who had a significant effect on my ways of thinking and doing.

The path to this particular thesis began in 2006 and 2007 when I was working as Assistant Director for the Centre of Flexible Learning at Macquarie University and had initiated a national program providing support to students with a disability across Australia. At that time, the service was called Macquarie University Accessibility Services (MCAS, later changed to MQAS).

In 2006–2007, we supported many students with a disability nationally who were studying at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and universities. Our support predominantly comprised providing alternative formats for students with sensory disabilities and consulting advice for designing teaching and assessment experiences so that individual students with high-end access needs could access the full learning experience. We also participated in international research projects associated with the development of assistive technology (AT). During this period, I became increasingly aware and concerned that we were not supporting any students with a disability who also identified as having Indigenous heritage.

In 2008, I attended the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities as a guest speaker; it was there that I met Roslyn Sackley: a Nyiampaa and Wiradjuri woman with total vision loss due to infant meningitis. Here, we began to share our common concerns for Aboriginal students with a disability and their support at that time in the university and TAFE system across Australia. Soon after this, Roslyn joined my team at Macquarie University. There began a friendship involving the common pursuit of answers and solutions to the problem of access for Indigenous students with a disability to the higher education sector.

In 2008–2009, while Roslyn was on the team, it came to our attention that a student who identified as being blind was studying through an Indigenous unit at an Australian university. Although this student was now in their final year of study, they had never accessed any additional disability support. One of the staff members approached us about this student; contact was then made with the student, various services were explained, and we commenced providing materials to this student (who was legally blind) in a format that they could access. This student proceeded to enjoy success in their qualification and complete additional higher education qualifications.

This experience began generating my White Questions, for which I sought and still seek Black Answers. Why did it take until the final year of the student's study for their access needs to be fed through the university system in order that support could be accessed? Did this only occur because the support centre now had Indigenous staff? Was it because we had an Indigenous staff member with a disability as the contact person that this Indigenous student with a disability was receptive to support?

Soon after this experience, in recognition of the need to have a significant representation of Indigenous staff in the MQAS national support service, other Indigenous staff with a disability were brought onto the team. In turn, this attracted national attention as we

became more outspoken in public forums regarding the needs of Indigenous students with a disability. One of our client universities contacted us regarding one of their students who was living remotely and wanting to study through their online distance education program. This student had been at the local school while her child was being assessed for dyslexia; during that process, she had recognised her own reading problems as a learning disability. Through observing the support received by her daughter in the school environment and being introduced to ATs that could read text out loud to her, she envisaged further education as an option for herself. She approached the university with her intention to undertake formal study to become a teaching assistant.

The student was living over 1,000 kilometres from the university campus; therefore, the disability support staff outsourced her support to our team. We decided to fly her to Sydney to meet her, listen to her story and identify her support needs. On meeting the student and introducing her to our team, we were able to identify her access needs, provide her with individualised training in AT and implement strategies and processes to produce and provide her with learning materials in alternative formats. Support continued for several years, and the student completed her studies. Her story and the story of MQAS focusing on the needs of Indigenous students with a disability was documented in an SBS series called ‘Living Black’, broadcasted nationally through the weeks following August 22, 2010.

At this time, momentum was growing for our team to undertake further research into the needs of Indigenous students with a disability, and Roslyn and I embarked upon our first formal research projects. As I was in a management role, I was able to employ two academics to help us through the research ethics processes and to scope out rigorous research methodologies. The first project we undertook involved working with focus groups of Indigenous students during their block release sessions, in which they would travel to Macquarie University from country and rural areas and engage in intensive studies for a period

of a few days at a time, before returning home to complete their studies through distance mode. Again, we were asking White Questions and seeking Black Answers: Why are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students with a disability not presenting for support? What are the barriers, both real and perceived, affecting students who need support? How is disability perceived by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students generally? Through these focus groups, I began to understand the cultural differences in attitudes towards disability in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island families and communities. These findings were shared at a national forum that we convened at Macquarie University on May15, 2012 with Professor Kieran Egan—at that time, the Canada Research Chair. This forum was attended by over 100 Indigenous leaders, lecturers and support staff from around Australia and New Zealand. Professor Egan presented a keynote on the Learning in Depth program used by Canadian Aboriginal academics at Simon Fraser University.

Due to the findings of the first project, our team embarked upon a second project that aimed to find a solution that would remove the need for students to identify that they had a disability or engage with the bureaucracy that existed to triage their support needs. For this second project, we secured funding from the Commonwealth Government through an Office of Learning and Teaching grant and backing from Microsoft Australia and Macquarie University in 2012.

For this project, we collaborated with colleagues at Charles Darwin University in Darwin, The Batchelor Institute in Alice Springs and the Indigenous support unit at Macquarie University Warawara. We engaged with the academics by bringing them to Sydney if necessary and working with them to establish the content requirements of the course we were piloting. We needed to know what they were teaching, how they were teaching, why they were teaching what they were teaching and how they needed to assess students. Using ePub, we put the courses together in ebook format with embedded videos captioned for students who were deaf

or hard of hearing and text that could be accessed using text-to-speech technology. The course looked like any online course; however, no internet access was required because it was to be delivered on a device such as an iPad. Microsoft Australia donated devices for use in Alice Springs and Darwin, and a Macquarie University grant was used to purchase iPads for the use of distance and remote Aboriginal students enrolled in the course at Macquarie University. This trial concluded in 2014, and the findings were reported in 'Impact of accessible eBooks on learning outcomes of Indigenous students' (Kerr et al., 2014). The considerable work of Mr Andrew Lovell-Simons on this project must be acknowledged here. As a non-Aboriginal man, he was kind, supportive and culturally safe in all that he did and said.

Our approach to developing these eBooks, using universal design principles, meant that Indigenous students with both diagnosed and undiagnosed sensory or learning disabilities could access learning materials using the tablets' in-built AT. Therefore, as was the project's aim, the need was removed for students to identify as having a disability or seek special assistance.

In addition to this ebook research project, we also developed (upon request) a similar ebook for the University of Otago, which wanted to serve its Maori students undertaking a bridging course in music more effectively. This ebook provided students the opportunity to use the musical keyboard application to record and submit assessment tasks. Another ebook using this methodology was kindly written by Vice-Chancellor Steven Schwartz to help promote this methodology. A UK Guardian article reported on his book on 15 March 2012—Schwartz was quoted as stating that:

> Ebooks, I believe, are the format of the academic future.
>
> My book also uses multi-media. You can read my work, see and listen to me talking about my ideas, and respond on my blog. Ebooks automatically fit the scale and format of any users' mobile device. Embedding audio and video within text makes the book

> more interactive. Users can also personalise their learning experience by changing the fonts and font sizes to suit their needs. (Schwartz, 2012)

Professor Stephen Schwartz donated the proceeds from this book's sale to inclusive scholarships for students at Macquarie University.

This project provided the opportunity for much learning and reflection. It gifted the technology and the course material, paid all travel and accommodation costs for teachers to come to Sydney for the development phase, and students overwhelmingly expressed their appreciation for this method of course delivery. However, I also took away much learning about conducting research that has an interface with Indigenous participants and a recognition of a gap in my own knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history and issues pertaining to Indigenous ways of doing and knowing. I felt discomfort regarding the research I was conducting; however, I was unsure why this was the case. For this reason, in 2013, I undertook a Masters of Indigenous Education. During the undertaking of this Masters program, I was introduced to the framework of 'cultural safety'. This framework resonated with me and spoke to my deep desire to serve and support effectively. The framework challenged me to reflect on my own bias, prejudice, physicality, appearance, beliefs, history and ways of communicating to understand how I present to others and the barriers that this presentation may create for some.

Since the initial chance meeting in Melbourne in 2008, Roslyn Sackley has been a friend, mentor, guide and teacher; she has encouraged me to pursue this research at all stages. If it were not for her encouragement and introduction to my Indigenous academic supervisor, Associate Professor John Gilroy, I would not have attempted or pursued this PhD. Roslyn has remained working with me and leads my Indigenous Advisory Group, which was formed following Associate Professor John Gilroy's advice and due to the need to be guided (as a non-Indigenous researcher) by a group of Indigenous people. Roslyn also participated in the data

collection as a cultural advisor—she sat with me through the interviews to make participants feel more relaxed and confident in the intention behind the research.

So, it is with this background that I embark upon this thesis:

White questions, Black answers: Effective inclusion of Indigenous students with a disability into higher education in Australia.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACOTAFE	Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AI	artificial intelligence
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANU	Australian National University
AT	assistive technology
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking
CAE	College of Advanced Education
DAP	Disability Action Plan
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Training
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
IEU	Indigenous Education Unit
ISSP	Indigenous Student Support Program
IST	Indigenous Standpoint Theory
ITAS	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
LAP	Learning Action Plan
MQAS	Macquarie University Accessibility Services
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
PC	person-centred
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
RTO	registered training organisations

TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UDL	Universal Design of Learning
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	Vocational Education Technology

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the Research

1.1 Study Aims

This study aimed to identify the barriers to and facilitators for the successful inclusion of Indigenous students with a disability in the Australian higher education sector and to develop a framework that could be used by the sector to inform effective institutional policies and practice. Central to this research project has been the voice of Indigenous people with a disability who are currently attempting or have previously attempted post-secondary education. Through listening to their personal stories—a core research activity—a framework was developed (presented in Chapter Seven) that has a solid foundation in Indigenous knowledge and responds to the following White question:

> How can the higher education sector effectively support and scaffold the success of Indigenous students with a disability and assure their human rights to equity of access to higher education and the life opportunities that it provides?

Additionally, this study had the sub-aim to undertake this research in a manner that was both effective and culturally safe, thereby demonstrating a conceptual framework available for future non-Indigenous researchers interfacing with Indigenous Australians to analyse:

- the white systems in which they work and live
- their ongoing roles as agents of colonisation
- the way that they are responding to Indigenous clients, patients and students
- how they can collaborate with Indigenous colleagues and lend their support to Indigenous human rights agendas.

The term ‘Indigenous’ has been used throughout this thesis to refer to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The term ‘Disability’ refers to any physical,

sensory, cognitive, emotional or psychosocial disability as defined under Section 4 of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1992).

1.2 Research Background

The numbers of Indigenous Australians with a disability continue to be proportionally much higher than those presenting with disability per head of the general Australian population. In 2017, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) demonstrated that almost one-quarter of Indigenous Australians report living with a disability (ABS, 2017a). As seen in Figure 1.1, the numbers of Indigenous Australians with a disability reporting Advanced Diplomas, Diplomas or Certificate III or IV as their highest level of educational attainment increased from 21.4 per cent in 2012 to 29.5 per cent in 2015. For the same period, the numbers of Indigenous Australians with a disability reporting a Bachelor or Higher degree declined (ABS, 2017a).

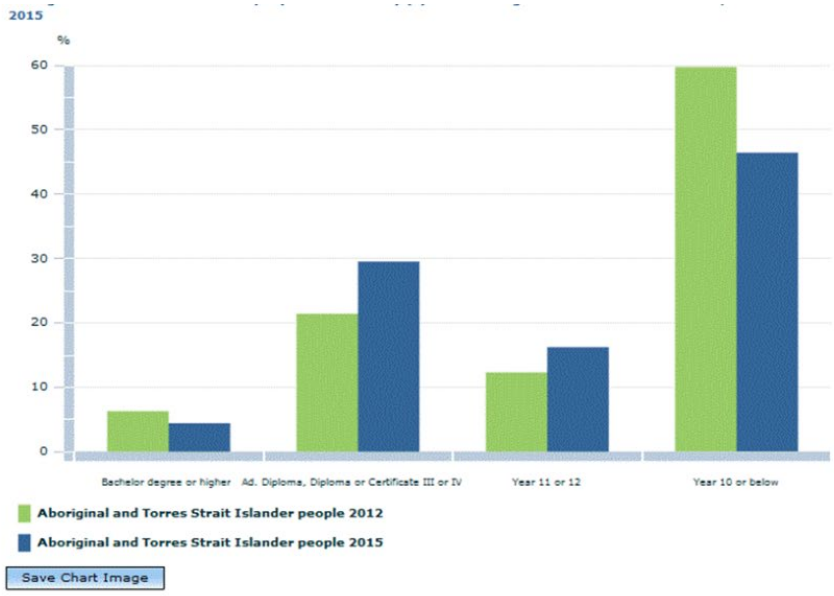

Figure 1.1

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People With Disability: Level of Highest Educational Attainment (2012, 2015) Source: ABS (2015)

Additionally, there is a clear trend towards increasing numbers of Indigenous students with a disability completing secondary education and gaining an Australian Tertiary Admission

Ranking (ATAR) for entry into higher education institutions. In 2017, 52.7 per cent of Indigenous students with a disability reported Year 11 or above, compared to 39 per cent in 2012 (ABS, 2016).

These figures provide the higher education sector with the challenge of recognising and effectively supporting a growing number of Indigenous Australians with a disability who are enrolling in higher education institutions. This research aimed to address this very challenge.

For Indigenous students and Indigenous students with a disability, several recognised impact factors have been shown to impede engagement and higher education success. These impact factors include, but are not limited to:

- poor foundational K–12 education
- unemployment
- incarceration
- poor health and access to health services
- poorly serviced accommodation
- limited individual expectations
- cultural perspective on disability
- accessibility barriers due to inaccessible learning environments
- geographical location.

Overviews for each of these impact factors follow.

1.2.1 *Poor Foundational K–12 Education*

There are substantial differences between the academic performance at age 15 of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In part, this difference may be attributed to differences in socio-economic status and other background variables and differences in schools attended by Indigenous students (Mahuteau et al., 2015, p. 34). It is well documented that equitable access to education directly correlates with access to employment opportunities (see

Kotzmann, 2018; Lazin et al., 2012). It is equally well documented that Indigenous Australians continue to have among the poorest access to quality education from an early age for reasons pertaining to poverty and deprivation of resources and opportunities (see e.g., Behrendt, 2012; Craven & Dillon, 2013; Saunders, 2011). Students who have had poor educational experiences during their K–12 school years often have not acquired the necessary foundational learning skills necessary to engage effectively with university or TAFE education.

The causation of poor foundational learning skills is multifaceted. The 2020 *Closing the Gap* report, an annual report produced for the Australian government, indicated that school attendance rates for Indigenous students nationally for Years 1–10 have consistently tracked 10 percentage points below those for non-Indigenous students (2014–2019). For the same period, between 17 and 19 per cent of Indigenous students were below the national minimum standards for numeracy; one in five in Years 5, 7 and 9 were below the national standards for literacy. While there have been significant improvements, there remains a 25 per cent gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth completing Year 12 studies (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020).

In recognition of poor foundational learning opportunities for Indigenous students, entry requirements in the higher education sector are often relaxed—alternative pathways are offered, and adjustment factors are added to their ATAR scores. This assists with initial opportunities to enrol; however, it does not mitigate barriers faced due to poor foundational education opportunities.

1.2.2 Unemployment

Unemployment statistics for Indigenous Australians are also disproportionate to the general population. In 2013, Indigenous Australians aged between 15 and 64 were four times more likely to be unemployed than non-Indigenous Australians. Nationally, just under half of the Indigenous population of working age had any employment in 2012–2013, with only

29.7 per cent working full time and 17.8 per cent working part time (ABS, 2014a). Only 13 per cent of Indigenous Australians with a disability are in employment (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2011a), indicating that disability is an added employment barrier for Indigenous people.

The link between access to education and successful engagement and employment is indisputable. The ABS has stated that people with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to be employed—80 per cent of persons with a Bachelors degree or above and 75 per cent of persons with an Advanced Diploma, Diploma or Certificate III or IV are employed. By comparison, 66 per cent of persons with Year 12 as their highest attainment and 46 per cent with Year 11 or below as their highest attainment are employed (ABS, 2014b).

Unemployment creates personal and community impact factors for Indigenous students with a disability and intersects with other impact factors, such as low expectations. Participation rates for all Australians with a disability are significantly lower than the general population, with a current rate of 53.4 per cent compared to 83.2 per cent participation rates for people without a disability (ABS, 2016). Figure 1.2 illustrates the unemployment figures for Indigenous Australians, with 27 per cent of 15 to 24-year-olds unemployed and 25 to 44-year-olds being nearly three times (17%) as likely to be unemployed than non-Indigenous Australians (6%). The overall unemployment figure for Indigenous Australians over the age of 15 in 2016 was 18 per cent. This figure has stayed relatively static for the past three censuses. In 2006, the unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians over the age of 15 was 16 per cent; in 2011, it was 20 per cent.

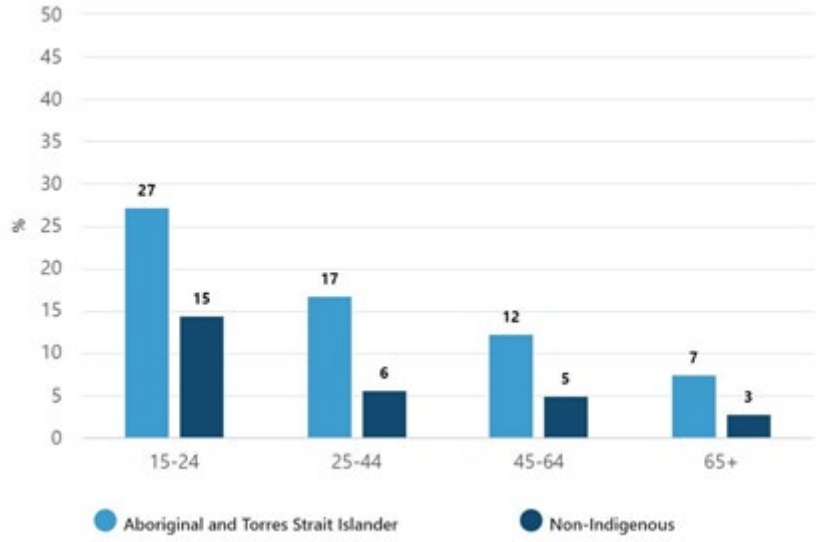

Figure 1.2

Persons Unemployed by Age by Indigenous Status (ABS, 2016)

Source: ABS (2016).

Table 1.1 illustrates the growth in post-school educational attainment by Indigenous Australians. It shows that, in parallel with the high unemployment numbers for Indigenous Australians, increased educational attainment is occurring, with significant growth in higher education participation and success.

Table 1.1

Educational Attainment Rate of Growth by Sex for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 20 to 64 (2011–2016)

	Postgraduate Degree, Graduate Diploma or Graduate Certificate	Bachelor Degree	Advanced Diploma or Diploma	Certificate level I to IV	Year 12
	Growth 2011 to 2016 (%)				
Males	127%	118%	135%	119%	110%
Females	152%	120%	147%	129%	103%

a. To remove the impact that natural population growth may have, the Rate of Growth is calculated using the change in proportions (%) of the male/female population with a qualification, not the change in counts of male/female population with a qualification.

Source: ABS (2011, 2016).

1.2.3 Incarceration

Incarceration is a significant impact factor for two reasons. First, post-secondary educational support for incarcerated people in Australia has primarily been provided by our universities and TAFEs through distance education (Gorta & Panaretos, 1990). Incarcerated students who study online are disadvantaged due to restrictions to online technology and the rules and regulations imposed by an increasingly privatised prison system (Hopkins, 2015). Second, with Indigenous Australians disproportionately represented in the prison system, Indigenous youth often face a crisis regarding believing that this will be their destiny. In 2020, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders accounted for 29 per cent of all prisoners nationwide, with 79 per cent of Indigenous prisoners having experienced prior adult imprisonment (ABS, 2020c). There are currently several initiatives originating in our educational institutions that provide pathways from incarceration and support Indigenous youth to avoid imprisonment. Institutions have the same responsibility to incarcerated distance students as internal students (Shepherd et al., 2016).

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has established that people who interact with the criminal justice system often have 'high levels of hearing impairment, cognitive disabilities, acquired brain injury, mental illness and language impairment' (2014 p. 12). The relationship between disability, lack of educational opportunity and incarceration rates for Indigenous populations has been recognised globally. Ben-Moshe et al. (2014) brought together a collection of chapters written from American and Canadian perspectives on this issue. Like Australia, Indigenous people, many with disabilities, are disproportionately represented in the prison system.

As Harrison (2014) has explained, prisoners have the right to education, as recognised under international human rights law. This right does not disappear because a person has committed a crime. Provision of education within Australian correctional services is the

responsibility of mainstream education providers, facilitated by correctional services education officers (Dawe, 2007). Participation in higher education varies from state to state; for example, in the Northern Territory all prisoners are encouraged to undertake educational programs, and there is discussion nationally to make higher education compulsory for all prisoners (de Graaff, 2007).

Australian correctional services have recognised the link between Indigeneity, disability, poor educational opportunity, unemployment, incarceration and recidivism. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended that Aboriginal prisoners be provided with vocational education and training, delivered such that the learning dispositions of Aboriginal prisoners are given appropriate special consideration (Dodson et al., 1991.

1.2.4 Poor Health and Access to Health Services

Ongoing health issues that have either been neglected or poorly managed can leave students physically, emotionally or psychologically compromised in terms of coping with study demands (Kutay et al., 2012). The cycle of the relationship between poor education and poor health begins making its impact early in many Indigenous students' lives. Prenatal and antenatal health may be affected by a mother's poor nutrition, substance abuse or lack of hygiene. Poor health support for a family at this vital stage of a child's development can be a significant causal factor in early childhood malnutrition and illness for an individual. Further, Yeung et al. (2013) highlighted that lack of access to early childhood education and intervention regarding health and socialisation often means that Indigenous children miss out on detection and support for disabilities, such as hearing loss and learning disabilities.

Bullying, discrimination, exclusion at school and family dysfunction can also affect a growing child's psychological health and emotional wellbeing. Additionally, Indigenous students often have lived experience of health problems resulting from a lifetime of poor

nutrition, substance use and injuries that have not been adequately addressed, which affect all levels of schooling (Thomson et al., 2012). All such health issues contribute to the individual narrative of students, how they respond in the higher education environment and how they cope with studying alongside students who have experienced good health and economic and physical security during their formative years (Beresford et al., 2012; Partington & Beresford, 2012).

1.2.5 Accommodation

Homelessness, overcrowding and poorly serviced accommodation are common barriers to higher education for many Indigenous people with a disability. Indigenous Australians are 3.5 times more likely to experience homelessness than the general Australian population (Partington & Beresford, 2012). Reduction in the level of low cost accommodation in Australian cities and towns and an undersupply of public housing has further exacerbated the lack of affordable housing (Australian Council of Social Service et al., 2015). Indigenous Australians are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, rental accommodation and areas where community members generally face disadvantage (Biddle, 2013). Venville et al. (2016) reported that students with mental health disabilities identify unstable accommodation coupled with financial stress as a significant barrier to successful tertiary education engagement.

1.2.6 Limited Individual Expectations

The impact factor of limited expectations has a high degree of intersectionality with other impact factors listed here—the literature supports this (see e.g., Hayes et al., 2006; Rowe, 2003; Sarra, 2003). Indigenous students with a disability are affected by attitudes of ableism and discrimination from various areas of life, feeding their sense of inferiority and low expectations. In their study of 46 school teachers, Riley and Pidgeon (2018) reported that 33 respondents (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) believed that teachers 'had different expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' (p. 130). Further, they found that teaching staff would automatically label Indigenous students as needing learning support.

Similarly, in the Canadian context, Riley and Ungerleider (2012) established that lower teacher expectations of Aboriginal children, based on their own bias, had a long-term impact on educational outcomes. In their work on the effect of family expectations on the success of people with a disability in post-secondary education, Qian et al. (2012) concluded that 'parent expectations serve as a critical moderating factor in influencing their children's own expectations toward postsecondary education as well as the value students assign to going to college' (p. 266). When students carry with them compromised expectations of their own ability to succeed, they may not envisage themselves in the role of successful student; therefore, they may not engage fully with the opportunities and support made available to them.

1.2.7 Cultural Perspective on Disability

Indigenous Australia comprises many discrete nations that have various cultural perspectives on all issues of life—disability is just one of these. An Indigenous student's cultural perspective on disability, which they have gained from their family and community, may be quite different from the mainstream Australian perspective—on which support services for students with a disability have been built. Gilroy et al. (2013) noted that many Indigenous communities found it offensive to label individuals or categorise them according to their abilities or disabilities; rather, they accept disability as a normal part of life, with family members assuming the responsibility to help each other within the close family and community structure. Further, Gilroy (2009a) has explained that family attitudes towards disability might be a barrier for individuals to declare a disability to external authorities; subsequently, they may refrain from accessing services due to issues of shame and embarrassment for their family.

1.2.8 Accessibility Barriers

Accessibility barriers refer to the barriers faced by Indigenous students due to their disability while studying in either a physical or online environment that is not accessible. In Australia, access barriers for people with a disability have been recognised and addressed under

the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA, 1992) and the supporting *Education Standards* (Department of Education, Skills and Employment [DESE] 2005).

Section 22 2(A) of the DDA states that:

(2A) It is unlawful for an education provider to discriminate against a person on the ground of the person's disability:

(a) by developing curricula or training courses having a content that will either exclude the person from participation or subject the person to any other detriment; or

(b) by accrediting curricula or training courses having such a content. (DDA, 1992)

Further, the accompanying *Education Standards* (DESE, 2005) provide greater granularity for setting out the legal obligations of teaching staff to be flexible to the access needs of their students (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

Education Standards Excerpt

Measures for compliance with standards Measures that the education provider may implement to enable the student to participate in the learning experiences (including the assessment and certification requirements) of the course or program, and any relevant supplementary course or program, on the same basis as a student without a disability, include measures ensuring that: (a) the curriculum, teaching materials, and the assessment and certification requirements for the course or program are appropriate to the needs of the student and accessible to him or her; and

(b) the course or program delivery modes and learning activities take account of intended educational outcomes and the learning capacities and needs of the student; and

(c) the course or program study materials are made available in a format that is appropriate for the student and, where conversion of materials into alternative accessible formats is required, the student is not disadvantaged by the time taken for conversion; and

(d) the teaching and delivery strategies for the course or program are adjusted to meet the learning needs of the student and address any disadvantage in the student's learning resulting from his or her disability, including through the provision of additional support, such as bridging or enabling courses, or the development of disability-specific skills; and

(e) any activities that are not conducted in a classroom, such as field trips, industry site visits and work placements, or activities that are part of the broader course or educational program of which the course or program is a part, are designed to include the student; and

(f) the assessment procedures and methodologies for the course or program are adapted to enable the student to demonstrate the knowledge, skills or competencies being assessed.

Source: DESE (2005, Section 6.3).

Additionally, Australia has obligations as a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD), which dedicates the entirety of Article 9 to accessibility with explicit reference to AT and alternative formats throughout the convention (United Nations [UN], 2008). Accessibility barriers are not limited to those caused by a student's disability and how these interact with their learning. In their review of accessibility barriers in the higher education sector for nursing students with a disability, Ryan

and Struhs (2004) noted that ‘it is clear that organisational and attitudinal barriers persist that hinder their [people with disability] full participation’ (p. 74).

1.2.9 Geographic Location

Only 32 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in major cities (ABS, 2011). Academic achievements of Indigenous students of all ages are much lower in rural and remote areas (Mahuteau et al., 2015). For Indigenous students with a disability living either in regional or remote areas or city suburbs that are poorly serviced by transport, health and education services, their capacity to successfully engage with higher education demands may be severely compromised (Lawrence, 2006).

1.3 Where We Have Come From: The Birth of Higher Education in Australia as a Tool of Colonisation

An examination of the Australian higher education sector’s history is necessary to understand the current tertiary education system in which Indigenous students with a disability are studying. This review of the history of higher education in Australia has been strongly influenced by the work of Gilroy et al. (2018) in their analysis of the history of the media in Australia over a similar period from 1830 onwards. Their analysis had at its foundation the premise that ‘both the high prevalence and experience of disability among Indigenous peoples remain directly linked to the events that followed European invasion’ (p. 1). It provides an insight into how both Indigenous people and those with a disability were viewed in society during the period in which universities and technical colleges were being established in Australia.

1.3.1 Establishment of Universities

Moreton-Robinson (2015) has described the context in which Australian universities were established:

> The British Empire established itself through colonisation and the concomitant waves of migrants from British shores to colonised ones. This was not a passive enterprise but was bound inextricably with the dispossession of the original owners of the land. Indigenous people only attained citizenship in the late 1960s and continue to be the most socioeconomically impoverished group in Australian society. The premise of colonisation that Australia belonged to no one informed the relationship between Indigenous people and the nation-state from its very inception, and it continues to do so. Legislation and state policies served to exclude Indigenous people from participation as citizens through their removal to reserves, missions, and cattle stations, where they lived their everyday lives under regimes of surveillance (p. 4).

In the 1850s, the first two Australian universities were established: the University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne. These universities were planned and established at a time of great debate throughout the British Empire regarding the role of universities in society. Simultaneously, other significant dynamics were at play in Australia. At this time, the Australian colonies were effectively being used as a safety valve for the metropolitan tensions in the UK, absorbing surplus population and providing a growth market for its goods (Taylor, 2000). Meanwhile, Australian Indigenous people were subjected to ongoing abuse, dislocation from land and disability due to disease and abuse. Their populations were in the process of being segregated and placed at the margins of society, and their lands were being invaded and cleared by graziers to graze their sheep and cattle, obliterating traditional food sources (Foley, 2007). Government policies affected their freedom, rights and livelihoods. These policies were determined through the lens of those protecting the economic and political interests of settlers and officials, who had little appreciation for the Aboriginal peoples' desire to continue occupying their land. Traditional owners were thrown into a cycle of violence as they tried to protect what was being taken from them. Dedicated forces of oppression such as the

Queensland Native Police were initiated to thwart their efforts and bring strength to the arm of the pastoralists (Slack, 2002). Attitudes towards Aboriginal people and lack of appreciation for their culture, connection to the land and ways of knowing and doing are reflected in the protestations of Reverend Joseph Oroton. He spoke (and preached) about Aboriginal people as 'indolent wandering, degraded people' who required being 'raised to the status of God-fearing, hard-working Christians' (Shaw, 1992 p. 285).

From 1848, the continued transportation of convicts from the UK led to civil disruptions on the part of white settlers who resisted this imposition on the territory they now occupied and viewed as their own. Transportation of convicts provided the stimulus for white settlers to become politically active and begin demanding constitutional change and a greater level of autonomy from colonial authority (Woollacott, 2015). Subsequently, in 1850, the Australian Colonies Government Act was passed in the British Parliament, allowing each of the Australian colonies the right to self-government (Australian Colonies Government Act, 1850). With this new power for self-government, 1850 saw both the commencement of the building of Sydney University and the creation of the first reserves for Aboriginal people (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, n.d.). The reserves were deemed necessary due to concern regarding the ongoing slaughter of Aboriginal people by settlers in battles throughout Australia (Shaw, 1992).

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The universities of eighteenth-century England (Oxford and Cambridge) were closely associated with maintaining the position of power of the wealthy and elite males of British society, to preserve the interests of the ruling class (Ellis, 2014). Slavery was only abolished in Britain in 1834, accompanied by legislation to limit immigration from Africa. The black British population continued to experience discrimination and deprivation; they were not included in policies and planning that aimed to provide access to higher education for the citizenry

(Huzzey, 2012). People with disabilities, without any welfare benefits, were ‘largely left to fend for themselves unless committed to an asylum or kept at home if members of a particularly wealthy and “caring” family’ (Leighton & Nielsen, 2020, p. 79). In Scotland, universities had been developed in urban locations with an emphasis on the university being related to the community; further, students of humble origins were given encouragement and support. In 1836, the University of London was established with state funding in response to the growing demand of those with social aspirations. Here began the concept of universities as institutions intended to serve their communities—albeit their white communities (Horne & Sherington, 2012).

It was against this backdrop of academic thought and political and social change that the Australian universities were conceived and built as public institutions. Aspirational white colonisers seeking social mobility and access to opportunity (in what they saw as their land) were, thus, provided with the opportunity for formalised higher education (Pietsch, 2013). As colonisers of Australia, the opportunity for their white sons (to the exclusion of all others) to attend these new institutions provided the pathway to securing positions of power and influence. Admission was granted based on academic merit rather than social class or wealth, allowing those colonisers who had enjoyed social mobility in this new country to access this powerful pathway to opportunity (National Museum Australia, 2020). Crucially, it took over a hundred years before an Indigenous Australian graduated from one of these institutions. In 1966, Charles Perkins graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Arts—he was the first Indigenous Australian to graduate with a tertiary degree (Read, 2001). Massacres of Indigenous Australians occurred up until the 1930s and were numerous at the time of the establishment of Sydney University. The University of Newcastle has constructed an online map of colonial frontier massacres linked to state-authorised murders at this time (Centre For 21st Century Humanities, 2019).

Until the beginning of the Second World War (1939), Australian universities continued primarily as teaching rather than research institutions. Academic pursuits were not tied to economic imperatives but rather to the students' interests, aspirations and passions. This approach to higher education in times of widespread poverty throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, including the Great Depression, led to widespread resentment about universities being publicly funded (Horne & Sherington, 2012). However, the Second World War also brought the demand for technological innovations to be used by the military. This significantly affected the perceived role of universities in society as they became part of the war machine. The central debate concerning universities' place in society was fuelled further by the increase in demand for employees with technological skills and the increasing influence of commercial enterprises. 'Knowledge for its own sake', as espoused by philosopher and theologian Cardinal John Henry Newman in the founding years of universities, was both questioned and challenged (Forsyth, 2013). At this point in the history of higher education, exclusion from university began to have economic consequences for individuals. Loss of opportunity to access and contribute to the development of new knowledge and participate in the technological revolution fuelling the post–Second World War economic boom affected the individual significantly. Access to higher education increasingly became the pathway to employment and opportunities in an era when Indigenous representation was non-existent in Australian universities and the Australian government was pursuing both assimilation and segregation policies, rendering Aboriginal Australians invisible (Haebich, 2008).

Gray (2001) has provided insight into the distance between the opportunities that universities offered in the 1940s and the slave-like existence of Indigenous Australians via sharing the voice of Bill Harney, a patrol officer with the Native Affairs Branch. Harney undertook a patrol of the western farming stations in June 1945 and gave a firsthand account of the working and living conditions of Indigenous Australians at the time:

> I encounted [*sic*] and inspected over 700 natives in this patrol and of that number 307 are working on the stations as stockmen, yard builders, teamsters, butchers, truck-drivers, etc. The hours of this work is from daylight in the morning till late at night for every day in the week and the only holiday is when they are on walkabout ... As usual with all these places a native is only looked upon as a labour unit, the health of the people only looked at, not from a human angle, but because sickness means a lowering of the labour unit, and this causes concern ... They work for no wages, just bread and beef with tea and sugar, his wife if young is worked too, children also work if old enough ... with few exceptions the housing conditions and supervision of these natives and their dependents is deplorable. (Gray, 2001 p. 27)

Simultaneously, as Indigenous Australians were living in slave-like conditions, in 1946, Australian universities entered a new era of power and influence with the Australian National University (ANU) opening in Canberra. The key role of this new university was set by its founding father Herbert Cole (Nuggett) Coombs[1] as a postgraduate research institution, thereby parting from the historical, traditional English, Scottish and Irish concept of the university as having the central purpose of teaching and learning. It is the only university in Australia to have been created by the Parliament of Australia. Further, the formation of ANU signalled a new approach to higher education by government and policymakers; its role included the

[1] Nugget Coombs later became an advocate and champion for Indigenous land and human rights, making him well respected throughout Indigenous communities. Coombs was Chancellor of ANU from 1968 to 1976, during which time he gained a growing awareness of the issues faced by Indigenous Australians. In the 1970s, he adopted the role of stimulating public debate regarding a treaty with Indigenous Australians. He led and chaired the Aboriginal Treaty committee, which 'not only led and informed non-indigenous opinion, it also helped to stimulate a public debate among indigenous Australians about their own political directions and leadership' (Rowse, 2000, p. 11).

responsibility of serving the nation's economic needs. From the outset, the composition of the student body at this new university differed markedly from students' representation at the other Australian universities; the student body was distinguished by private school graduates and the children of public servants (Foster & Varghese, 1996).

Significantly, as the feeder institutions of universities, Australian school systems were also changing at this time. The Commonwealth Government was funding and giving increased tax concessions to private schools; this, in turn, drove elitism within and throughout the education systems. The opportunity to gain access to university education was to be provided based on the perception of intelligence (McQueen & Poynting, 2007). Psychological testing and the introduction of entrance examinations to universities further limited access to higher education for those who came from poorer areas and whose schools and families were ill equipped to groom their students for success. It would later be established that students of different cultural backgrounds to those of the examiners were at a disadvantage (Farrell, 1997). All these influences contributed to the ongoing agenda of colonisation and the marginalisation of the poor and disadvantaged.

In the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970s, Aboriginal people gained the support of university students in their struggle for recognition of their postcolonial rights (Morris, 2015). Along with protests and public marches, protesting for the end of the Vietnam War, equity and opportunity for Indigenous Australians—fuelled by the Freedom Rides led by Charles Perkins and Gary Williams, Aboriginal students at the University of Sydney—was placed on the Australian public agenda (Read, 2001). From 1965, the Freedom Rides took the Australian public on a tour of racist Australia into the country towns of New South Wales where Aboriginal children were prohibited from swimming in public pools with other local children and apartheid conditions and prejudice pervaded all aspects of the community (Curthoys, 2014).

In 1973, Australia saw the election of the first Labour government in 23 years, led by Gough Whitlam. His government introduced social reforms that affected the higher education sector, including policies that targeted empowering people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to access higher education with the removal of fees for students attending universities and colleges of advanced education (Forsyth, 2014; Rasmussen, 2015; Twomey & Boyd, 2016). Despite the introduction of these policies, it is difficult to find data to support the premise that this short window of opportunity for a free university education had an impact on the social inclusion of diverse equity groups. However, the reforms of the later Labour government (led by Bob Hawke) introduced widespread changes to the higher education sector. John Dawkins, appointed as Minister for Employment, Education and Training in July 1987, brought in changes to the sector that are still currently working their way through the system. These changes were so profound that they have been labelled the Dawkins revolution (Gale & Parker, 2013).

The changes brought about by Dawkins occurred in three major areas (see Croucher & Woelert, 2015; Horne, 2020; Perrin, 2018). First, colleges of advanced education were amalgamated into the university sector. Second, universities were told that they needed to become more efficient, competitive and aligned with national economic priorities. This opened the way for the export of education, the growth of the international student market and the increase of political and economic influence on research. Third, managerialism was promoted to align universities with the demands of the economy. The move to managerialism had a profound impact on the traditional organisational structures of universities. Reduction of tenured positions, casualisation of staff, the introduction of performance reviews and the appointment of managerial staff instead of academic staff in leadership roles all had their origins in the reforms introduced by the Dawkins ministry. Partial payment of university fees was introduced, and the phenomena of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)

debts became part of the lexicon and experience of students studying at university in Australia (Watts, 2010).

The Dawkins years also heralded a new era of expansionism within the university sector. In 1979, there were 300,000 people enrolled in Australian universities, growing to 1,000,000 in 2009. In 2013, enrolments were over 1,300,000, 30 per cent of whom were international students (Australian Gov 2014; Forsyth, 2014). By 2013, though still under-represented, more Indigenous students and Indigenous students with a disability were enrolling in Australian universities. At this time, Indigenous students accounted for one per cent of the student population in higher education (ABS, 2013), with many universities initiating Indigenous Education Units (IEUs) as 'safe' places for Indigenous students to study and connect with other Indigenous students. For the most part, these IEUs were separate from other student support services and networks, often resulting in a siloing of services (Fleming & Grace, 2016).

1.3.2 Vocational Education Sector

The TAFE or Vocational Education Technology (VET) sector has been the other key player in the Australian higher education market. Historically, TAFE—and, more recently, VET—has been the post-secondary school destination of a high percentage of students from a low socio-economic background. In his work examining the VET sector through the lens of equity and opportunity for all, Polesel (2010) concluded that 'poorer students are being ill-served by these programs, both in terms of the labour market value of the qualifications delivered and in terms of actual transitions' (p. 426). With Indigenous students numbering among the poorest students in our community, Polesel's conclusion is a key consideration in understanding the colonisation agenda's machinations.

The establishment of the TAFE sector preceded the university sector by almost 20 years. Fashioned on the apprenticeship system prevalent in the UK at the time, the first

mechanics institutes and schools of arts were established in Hobart in 1827 (the Mechanics Institute) and Sydney in 1833 (the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts in 1833), with Newcastle, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane all establishing similar institutions by 1840 (Goozee, 2001).

From their inception, these institutions were viewed as practical training grounds where students could acquire the skills required by the economy. Classes, curriculum and learning were designed so that students who were either employed or serving an apprenticeship were able to engage with learning. Historically, such institutions have delivered very practical courses, aimed at grooming students for positions determined by the economic and political climate of the day. Therefore, their purpose, mission, funding and governance have been quite different from universities and significantly affected by the political agenda of their relative state or territory government.

In her work on the development of TAFE in Australia, Goozee (2001) alluded to the tension between the universities and technical colleges. Goozee described how technical education in Australia developed in such a way that universities took the best of the courses for their own business purposes. She gave the example of the friction in the 1890s and 1900s between the Sydney Technical College and the University of Sydney regarding who should teach certain courses. As registration boards for certain professions were formed, the minimum criteria of a degree for practice were imposed and, subsequently, the responsibility for training transferred to the university sector. Early examples of this are dentistry, pharmacy, engineering and, later, teaching, journalism and marketing (Goozee, 2001). On transferring these courses to the university sector, admission to the courses and access to the lucrative career opportunities they afforded was then limited to those who met the university requirements—thereby excluding the Indigenous population from these opportunities and professions. From a colonising perspective, this division between the professions and the trades within the higher education sector and subsequent employment opportunities effectively maintained

opportunities of privilege for the elite to the exclusion of Indigenous Australians. It is notable that:

- The first Indigenous medical doctors in Queensland only graduated in the mid-1990s (Bond et al., 2020).
- In 2006, of 150,000 registered accountants in Australia, only nine identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders (Lombardi & Clayton, 2007).
- The first Aboriginal lawyer in South Australia graduated in 1985 (Hancock, 2016).
- In 2019, there was only one Indigenous ophthalmologist in Australia (Fryer, 2019).

Similar examples are evident in all the professions of power, control and opportunity throughout Australia.

1.3.2.1 Universities Versus Vocational Education Technology

In 1956, the Commonwealth Government commissioned an enquiry into universities and technical colleges. This enquiry, chaired by K. A. Murray, reported in 1957, recommending that all professional training should be the domain of universities and all non-professional training should be handled by technical colleges (Murray et al., 1957). This report also urged universities to resist the pressures from accrediting bodies to shift non-professional courses into the universities. They saw this trend as a threat to the very fabric of the universities that would result in overstretching resources and reducing the overall quality of university studies and their elitist standing. The *Murray Report* focused on the importance of the university environment to foster and develop the skills of higher-order thinking, analysis and discovery in their students to equip the country to meet the challenges of tomorrow. In contrast, the technical institutes were there to provide training to meet the current skill demands. The report saw vocational focus for university students as a problem requiring mitigation; however, for students of technical colleges, vocational focus was their reason for existing.

As with the colleges and universities, the economic and social changes of the late 1960s and the Whitlam government's actions brought significant change for the technical institutes. By the early 1970s, public awareness of the underfunding of technical education, in addition to the recognition of the role it needed to play, was front and foremost on the public political agenda. In 1973, the Whitlam government recognising the strategic and planning gap regarding vocational education and instituted the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE), chaired by Myer Kangan (Goozee, 2001). This committee was formed to conduct a full enquiry into publicly funded technical education. Through widespread consultation and data collection through a survey of all technical colleges in Australia, the committee identified deep levels of need within the sector. It proposed extensive recommendations based on increasing funding to the sector, providing support to students, ensuring that TAFEs were well equipped with new technologies and focusing the purpose of the sector on the development of the individual so that they were able to respond positively to change and opportunity. Indigenous Australians did not warrant a mention in the *Kangan Report*; equity initiatives focused on supporting women to enter the workforce and the retraining needs of migrants. An acknowledgement was given to the restricted access afforded to people with a disability, stating that 'TAFE systems have not catered as well for them as they could and should. Access is restricted not only by physical problems of design of buildings and equipment but also by curriculum structures, time limits on courses, and timetabling of classroom instruction' (ACOTAFE, 1974, p. 89). The *Kangan Report* was followed in 1978 by the *Fleming Report*: the formal preparation of TAFE teachers in Australia (Tertiary Education Commission, 1978). These reports initiated a move towards credentialism for TAFE training staff, requiring that training staff had higher education qualifications, at least to an Associate Diploma level. Following the Productivity Commission in 2011, this was reduced to a Certificate IV level (Harris, 2017).

This period initiated an awakening to the existence of barriers to equitable access to education and recommendations to mitigate their impact. Major themes in the two-volume report included: quality of training, equity initiatives, foundation learning opportunities for those with gaps in their education and flexibility in offerings to allow students to learn both at their own pace and at times convenient to their work schedule. The committee appealed for research into the sector, stating that 'if TAFE is to fulfil its role and be accessible to adults without discrimination in the manner in which the Committee envisages, research must be encouraged into what is at present virtually a barren desert' (ACOTAFE, 1974, p. xix). The *Kangan Report* provided a blueprint for successive governments regarding strategic planning and funding for the TAFE sector. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the sector underwent significant change and growth, defined to a great extent by the *Kangan Report* findings and the responsibility assumed by successive governments to fund new buildings, staff development, libraries, curriculum development and research (Goozee, 2001).

By the time the Commonwealth Government released its *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998–2003*, it was clear that the pendulum had once again swung in the direction of a firm focus on meeting industry requirements, ensuring mobility of the labour market and achieving efficiencies in the public training budget. The ideals of personal development, social mobility and remedial training to address learning deficits, as espoused in the Kangan Report, were no longer front and centre. In their place was language such as: 'building the national stock of skills to meet industry needs' (Australian National Training Authority, 1998). Coupled with this was the idea of TAFE being a key player in the diverse training market, providing a trusted brand with established capital stock. While it was stated that 'specific priorities *might* include: increasing participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in vocational education and training … (and) retention and completion rates in vocational education and training for people with a disability' (p. 13), there was no

mention of how these priorities might be actioned anywhere in the report. This is surprising given that it was a national strategy for the VET sector, and the DDA had been in place since 1992, legislating equitable access to education for people with a disability.

In 2012, the state and territory governments set the path to privatisation and the opening up of the training sector to market forces in a manner that would eventually also be followed by universities. With the signing of the *National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform* between all states, territories and the Commonwealth Government, private and public registered training organisations (RTOs) were equalised. RTOs first came into prominence in the mid-1990s and enabled private enterprises to deliver and accredit nationally recognised qualifications (Smith & Smith, 2009). With the signing of this agreement, RTOs could secure government funding and compete with the VET sector for students (Council of Australian Governments, 2012).

The agreement sought the following outcome: providing vocational training nationally that was more accessible, transparent, of higher quality and more efficient regarding resourcing. Further, it lay the foundations for TAFE colleges to be more responsive to employers and licensing bodies and provide smooth transition opportunities from state to state and institution to institution. In return for the injection of $1.75 billion from 2012–2013 to 2015–2016, states and territories signed up to this agreement (Council of Australian Governments, 2012). The 3,000 registered training providers that had emerged from the private sector at the time of the release of the skills reform were described as being responsive, efficient and able to meet client demand. This national strategy was set to provide students with more choice and ensure that all colleges, both private and public, had the opportunity to compete for public funding.

Many Aboriginal students, and others who were vulnerable to the marketing initiatives of these RTOs, found themselves exploited and saddled with significant debts without

receiving education or certification. Indigenous students could secure government loans up to $96,000 for their course that required payment after their annual income reached $53,000. This exploitation of vulnerable students led to the deregistering of many RTOs in 2018–2019, with the Commonwealth Government working to provide redress to victims (Redfern Legal Centre, 2013).

Since its inception in 1827, TAFE has been expected to fill the education and training gap between what students gained through secondary education and what was required by employers. This led to a proliferation of courses, with each institute commonly offering hundreds of courses. For example, in 2014, South West Sydney Institute offered 600 courses and had 67,826 enrolments (TAFE New South Wales, 2016). In 2015, TAFE was still the largest provider of post-secondary education in Australia. However, by 2020, with the recent reforms being brought in due to the *National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform*, TAFE was competing with 4,059 private RTOs across Australia (National Careers Institute, n.d.). By 2021, the number of courses offered by South West Sydney Institute had been reduced to 107 (training.gov.au, n.d.a). This shift from a centralised VET sector to a dispersed sector has caused multiple RTOs to be relied upon to devise and implement equity and inclusion policies for Indigenous students and students with a disability. This has been addressed to varying degrees of success by various state funding bodies providing additional fees payable to RTOs for Indigenous students or students with a disability enrolled in courses (VET, n.d.).

As these changes were quite recent at the time of writing this thesis, data and analysis of the impact of this change were not available. Further investigation in this area is required, particularly as Polesel (2010) has claimed that these students were poorly served before these changes. Therefore, outputs from this research will be mindful of the student support needs of such a disparate group of VET providers.

Figure 1.3 illustrates the shifts in Indigenous students' enrolment patterns during this period of reform to the VET sector. A significant decline in the percentage of Indigenous students enrolled in post-school courses attending TAFE is evident: from 56.5 per cent of enrolled students in 2001 to 40.9 per cent in 2016. There was also a modest increase in those enrolled in RTOs listed as 'other', up from 10.7 per cent of enrolled students (2001) to 14.2 per cent (2016). Indigenous students appeared to have shifted their post-school enrolments directly to universities, up from 32.8 per cent of enrolled students in 2001 to 44.9 per cent in 2016 (ABS, 2020b).

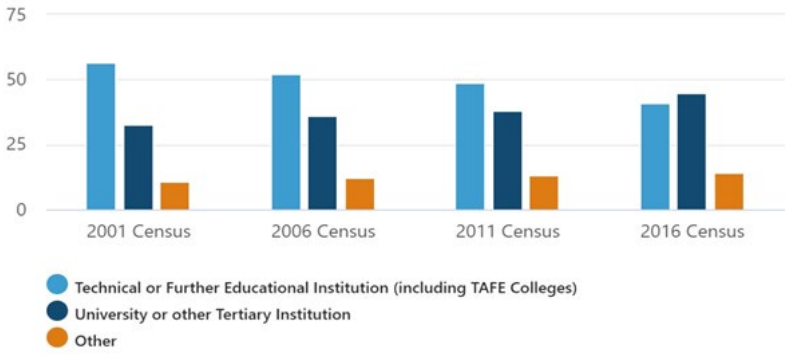

Figure 1.3

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students Attending Higher Education Sector Institutions in Australia Source: (ABS, 2020b)

1.3.3 Deregulation of Universities in Australia and the Growth of Online Education

In the 2014 May Budget, the Australian Treasurer announced the Commonwealth Government's intention to deregulate the higher education sector. This deregulation policy was to provide universities with the opportunity to set university fees according to market determinants. Further, the government was to increase private and international providers' viability to enter the Australian market and compete with publicly funded universities.

Additionally, a new scholarship scheme for students from disadvantaged backgrounds was introduced (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014). Indigenous students or students with a disability were not explicitly mentioned alongside these changes.

Deregulation and individual institutions' ability to compete in the international education market has caused an influx of international students into the Australian higher education sector. In 2019, the number of international students studying across the university and VET sectors had risen to 754,656, with 22 per cent of these students coming from China (Australian Trade and Investment Commission, 2020). Revenue from the international student market grew from $4.8 billion in 2014 to $7 billion in 2017, with the sector spending $622 million on marketing in 2017 (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2020). By 2020, universities had become a major export industry for Australia. Tertiary education was recognised as Australia's fourth largest export and worth $38.5 billion annually to the Australian economy (Universities Australia, 2021). Further, by 2020, online delivery was ubiquitous across the sector, with all universities, TAFEs and the majority of RTOs delivering courses online (University Rankings, 2020). Education's standing as a commercial good rather than a public service funded solely by the government brought a major cultural shift to the sector. The focus of the sector before the 2020 event of COV1D19 was on entrepreneurial expansion, marketisation and internationalisation (Garrett-Jones & Turpin, 2012). While government funding programs were available to reward institutions for attracting and retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the funding to be gained from these ($134.6 million in 2020) dwarfed the rewards from seeking and securing students from the international market (DESE, 2020).

Additionally, the emerging reliance of higher education providers on the education market had been shown to place providers at the mercy of geopolitical variances, where international and domestic demand for their goods are not assured. In the event of a disruption

to demand, the impetus for cost cutting and savings is increased. In her review of Australian university strategic plans in 2016, Ciancio (2018) recorded that 69 per cent of Australian universities were engaged in service excellence and efficiency endeavours with business improvement methodologies reflected in their strategic plans. She also noted that 'institutional financial sustainability' was the third most prevalent strategic goal, with 46 per cent of universities stating this as a highlevel goal and 21 per cent indicating 'excellence' (Ciancio, 2018). In 2019, a report released by the Centre for Independent Studies revealed that major Australian universities were highly exposed to the international student market from China; therefore, a slight downturn in demand could be catastrophic for the sector. In 2017, the University of Sydney was quoted as having generated half a billion dollars in annual course fees from the Chinese student market (Babones, 2019). The events of 2020 and COVID19 have proven the accuracy of this projection.[2]

At this time of immense change, enrolments of Indigenous students in the higher education sector have also been on an upward trajectory; in 2017, they stood at 9,490 (Universities Australia, 2019). Support for this cohort of students falls under the Indigenous Student Support Program (ISSP): a financial incentive program for education providers to scaffold Indigenous students' success. Institutions receive incentive payments for the employment of senior Indigenous staff, enrolments of Indigenous students and additional subsidies for completions and rural and remote Indigenous students (Australian Government, 2019). In 2017, funding for the ISSP program stood at $67.5 million (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

2 The impact of COVID19 and the Australian government's response, the decline of the Australian higher education sector and the impact on opportunities and support for Indigenous students with a disability in light of the findings from this research is included in Chapter Seven.

The privatisation of our higher education system has been a significant consequence of the commercialisation of the education system and its transformation to a market rather than a service for Australian citizens. At the time of writing, the number of institutions in Australia issuing degrees is 175 (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2019) and the number of RTOs delivering vocational education is 4,049 (training.gov.au, n.d.b).

1.4 Where We Are Now: The Ongoing Impact of Colonisation in Our Higher Education Institutions

1.4.1 Interface with Staff and Systems

Ongoing 'colonisation by the cultures of management and marketisation' (Strhan, 2010, p. 230) holds multiple potential implications for Indigenous students with a disability. In their study of the staffing of three Australian universities, Pick et al. (2011) identified the negative impact that the shift to managerialism has had on staff morale and stress levels, including:

- 55 per cent expressing frustration at not receiving sufficient training and development
- 54 per cent having insufficient staff to complete work on time and to the expected standard
- 51 per cent citing the need to deal with complaints or difficult customers as major stressors (Pick et al., 2011, p.11).

Students' commodification in this new paradigm for higher education requires Indigenous students with a disability to interface with staff who potentially lack professional development, are stressed and are time poor.

Prinsloo & Slade (2014) have highlighted that, to increase economic efficiencies within institutions, the triaging of students is increasingly being conducted using technology with embedded institutional bias. This development in the use of technology to administer support services causes an imperative for the support needs of vulnerable cohorts of students to be

acknowledged and included in the design briefs and requirements issued to artificial intelligence (AI) developers for local institutions. Popenici and Kerr (2017) observed rapid advancement in the use of these AI systems in Australian institutions; their uptake is being fuelled by defunded universities seeking to find economic solutions to balance depleted budgets. AI systems developed now will capture the values and priorities currently prevalent in our institutions and automate the support and services afforded to individuals accordingly into the future. Awareness of our universities' colonial underpinnings and a concerted effort to embed decolonising and inclusive values and mechanisms into algorithms that underpin the emerging AI-operated systems is potentially a new issue regarding equity of access to support and opportunity for all students. Therefore, this research aimed to produce outputs that the sector may use to inform AI-operated student support and teaching systems.

1.4.2 Impact of Promotion of Elitism of Higher Education and Othering of the Non-Elite

It is well documented that the impact factor of limited expectations faced by Indigenous students with a disability has evolved through the ongoing process of colonisation (Hayes et al., 2006; Sarra, 2003; Rowe, 2003). When students carry with them compromised expectations of their ability to succeed, they may not envisage themselves in the role of successful student; therefore, they may not engage fully with the opportunities and support made available to them. If students are also coping with access barriers due to disability, they are likely to have even further constrained expectations of their ability to succeed. Messages of elitism promoted by the higher education sector since the 1850s may further confirm a student's perception that they are unworthy of attempting education. Despite the social inclusion agenda of our higher education system, Riley et al. (2013) have noted that this agenda's effectiveness for Indigenous Australians is affected by it being an add-on to the higher education system rather than a central premise. Young (2008) has demonstrated the enormity of the field of debate by educational sociologists and philosophers regarding mass education, the democratisation of knowledge,

and the interplay of the two in the growth of the world's knowledge economies. The messages being received by Indigenous students and other disaffected groups are not due to errors in their perceptions. Rather, they reflect the philosophical attitudes held by those in positions of influence in the higher education sector regarding the questions of who owns knowledge and who has the right to access it. Young (2008) discussed social inclusion in terms of economic and political pressure on institutions rather than as an indicator of growth and development in society. This way of thinking reflects an ideological and philosophical standpoint that can create barriers for Indigenous students with a disability by promoting institutional resistance to inclusive initiatives. Further, the messages of elitism and unwillingness of faculty and departments to be flexible to meet students' needs create further barriers to access for success for those students described as 'non traditional'. Snowden & Lewis (2015) observed that:

> Persistence of communication practices and messages that promote the superiority of university and the low success rates of students from disadvantaged backgrounds contributes to the persistence of entrenched views about post-secondary education. (p. 585)

When institutions communicate a message to the broader community of the elitism and difficulty of higher education, coupled with the high failure rates of the non-elite, this may be the message received by individuals, regardless of the welcoming attitudes of individual support or teaching staff. Further, a person with low personal expectations will be more vulnerable to these messages.

This narrative faced by Indigenous students with a disability is a form of institutional 'othering' that supports the colonising agenda. In the context of research, 'othering' is explained by Mills et al. (2010) as:

> The term used to communicate instances of perpetuating prejudice, discrimination, and injustice either through deliberate or ignorant means. Othering is most obvious where

> researchers, their paradigms and processes, and their reports have objectified or exotified a person, group, or community. Othering in case study research usually portrays a particular case or set of cases in an essentialised or overly simplistic manner. This highly stereotyped characterisation ignores similarities among cases and holds difference as contributing to problems, in a blaming manner. (p. 656)

In 2008, the Review of Australian Higher Education commissioned by the Commonwealth Government saw an increasing focus on Indigenous students' poor success rates. Notably, while the report referred to Indigenous students 200 times, the focus was not from an equity perspective but rather from an economic rationalist standpoint, reflecting an attitude of 'othering' by its authors, who stated in the executive summary that:

> The nation will need more well-qualified people if it is to anticipate and meet the demands of a rapidly moving global economy. Work by Access Economics predicts that from 2010 the supply of people with undergraduate qualifications will not keep up with demand. To increase the numbers participating we must also look to members of groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas. (Bradley et al., 2008, p. xi)

The use of this type of deficit language—considering Indigenous people disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth and identity—and perspective in a government report may feed through the higher education system and government departments responsible for initiating and implementing inclusion policies.

1.4.3 The Interface of Those With an Indigenous Perspective on Disability With the Higher Education Sector

Another impact of colonisation on Indigenous students with a disability in the higher education sector is the imposition of a homogenous view of disability, what disability is and

how and if it should be reported, verified and supported. For many Indigenous students, their attitudes towards disability services and support have been built on family experiences of negative consequences due to engagement, including removal from family and isolation of the person with a disability from their community and culture (Gilroy, 2009b; Nakata, 2007). Indigenous students with a disability may not have had support for their disability before engaging with higher education or a prior experience of positive outcomes after seeking support.

Institutional bias is evident in how social inclusion is defined and implemented within Australian universities, which is not inclusive of the Indigenous perspective on disability. In their book, *Student Equity in Australian Higher Education*, Harvey et al. (2016) brought together the work of several academics with a collective focus on reviewing the status of equity of access to higher education 25 years on from the *Fair Chance for All Framework* that emerged from the Dawkins reforms to higher education (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990). They addressed the impact that the change in the education landscape has had on this equity agenda—with one-quarter of all students now coming from the overseas market—and concluded that 'establishment of the equity categories themselves has enabled effort to be focused, but has also created missing and marginalised cohorts' (Harvey et al., 2016, p. 4). Indigenous students with a disability are one such cohort affected by multiple barriers that equity initiatives have not addressed. Through not being identified as a cohort for equity targets, they have not been considered or counted in the initiatives of the past 25 years.

1.4.4 Summary and Research Questions

This chapter has identified barriers faced by Indigenous students with a disability engaging with higher education from the literature. It has also provided a brief history of higher education in Australia, the role of ongoing colonisation and the development of an exclusive

system that continues to exclude those erroneously labelled as non-traditional students. Running parallel to the Australian higher education sector's growth is the marginalisation and exclusion of Indigenous Australians from the sector and the subsequent life opportunities that come from engagement with higher education. The chapter concluded with an analysis of the higher education sector, which has shifted its core purpose from serving local Australian interests to selling education in the international market.

It is difficult to secure reliable data on the rates of disability in Indigenous students in the higher education sector. However, Indigenous disability rates for school-age students have been recorded at 13.9 per cent, compared to 6.6 per cent for non-Indigenous students (Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities, 2003). It is this cohort of students that this research aims to serve as they leave secondary school and embark upon higher education. How can the higher education sector ensure that these students are not overlooked as the sector adjusts its teaching and delivery to meet the needs of growing international and domestic markets? What is the sector doing well, and what could be improved? What are the implications for Indigenous students with a disability—who may or may not recognise that they have a disability—of institutional use of online learning systems, student management systems, ebooks and student support administered by AI (see Kerr & Baker, 2013; Kerr et al., 2014; Popenici & Kerr, 2017)? Are there ongoing colonising agendas in the higher education sector that continue to pose barriers for Indigenous students with a disability? If so, can they be changed? If not, how can the negative impact of these agendas be mitigated?

For this study, these questions have been conflated to form the central research question:

> How can the higher education sector effectively support and scaffold the success of Indigenous students with a disability and assure their human rights to equity of access to higher education and the life opportunities that it provides?

To inform the answer to this central research question, the line of inquiry sought to discover:

- What are universities doing concerning supporting Indigenous students with a disability?
- What lessons can be learned from listening to the stories of Indigenous people with a disability who have lived experience of navigating the Australian higher education sector?

1.5 Thesis Outline

Chapter One provides the research background and aims. Using relevant literature, it identifies the barriers faced by Indigenous students with a disability who engage with higher education and highlights the colonising history of higher education in Australia. The chapter concludes with the research questions for this study.

Chapter Two presents the theoretical context as the foundation for the conceptual framework that forms the research's scaffolding. The chapter reviews relevant theories, which form the theoretical underpinning for this study and are presented in a model that informs the conceptual framework. The theoretical framework provided the scaffold for my thought processes, while the conceptual framework guided my actions and the undertaking of all research activities.

Chapter Three presents the conceptual framework and introduces the research methods scaffolded by this conceptual framework. The mixed methods convergent approach is outlined, as are each of the two research Tracks. Further, the Indigenous Advisory Group and cultural broker's roles are described, as is the application of the conceptual framework to the research process.

Chapter Four presents the data and findings of Quantitative Track Studies One and Two. These two studies comprised the audit of 40 university websites and the review of

Disability Action Plans (DAPs) to gauge policies and approaches to supporting Indigenous students with a disability.

Chapter Five presents the findings of Qualitative Track Study One, in which five Indigenous Australians with a disability who had undertaken higher education shared their stories.

Chapter Six presents the converged and triangulated analysis of the data from both Quantitative and Qualitative Tracks, with the research findings, inclusive of the feedback from the Indigenous Advisory Group. This is followed by the presentation of the *Framework for All*: a decolonising framework.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by drawing on the research findings and discussing the way forwards in supporting Indigenous students with a disability—and, by default, all students with a disability—throughout the Australian higher education sector. The disruption caused by the COVID19 pandemic is embraced as an opportunity for the sector to move away from its colonising ways of knowing and doing, to streamline bureaucracy and reimagine an inclusive higher education sector. Recommendations for further research are also presented. The thesis ends with a call to recognise the importance of institutions embracing the human rights of Indigenous students with a disability to access education and, thus, provide lawful and equitable access to education and the opportunities it offers.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Context – *my way of knowing*

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One provided an overview of the barriers faced by Indigenous students with a disability engaging with the higher education sector due to issues associated with Indigeneity, disability and the nature of the higher education sector. A history of the higher education sector in Australia provided background to the current system, illuminating the historical exclusion of Indigenous students and the current system that has evolved with its roots in colonisation and as an ongoing agent for colonisation. The chapter concluded with the formation of a central research question for this thesis:

> How can the higher education sector effectively support and scaffold the success of Indigenous students with a disability and assure their human rights to equity of access to higher education and the life opportunities that it provides?

This chapter will present the theoretical context that provided a foundation for the conceptual framework that has shaped the research methods outlined in Chapter Three. The theoretical context outlined in this chapter points towards the conceptual framework given in Chapter Three, providing the lens through which the research was conceived and through which data was analysed and conclusions made.

2.2 Theoretical Context Shaping the Conceptual Framework for the Research

2.2.1 Introduction

Setting the theoretical context (my way of knowing) was guided by Sitwala Imenda (2014), who focused on the inductive process of using theoretical material to inform the subsequent development of the conceptual framework and methods. This process comprises two parts. First, an overview was conducted of critical theories and contemporary writing

relevant to a non-Indigenous researcher researching an area that affects Indigenous students' lives. Core to this theoretical context, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, has been:

- the Indigenous standpoint and decolonising theories as the foundation to the theoretical context
- the human rights theory and associated Universal Design of Learning (UDL) theory and the social model of disability theory, presented together as they represent the legal, moral and ethical imperatives for inclusive education
- educational sociology and institutional theory presented together as they provide the theoretical context for social and institutional change
- the theory of cultural safety and person-centred (PC) theories, as they represent the interface with Indigenous participants by a non-Indigenous researcher. These two theories sit at the top of the pyramid to exemplify a readiness for undertaking research
- a pyramid chosen to symbolise strength—each layer of the pyramid converges with the next, representing an imperative theoretical foundation for the ascending theory.

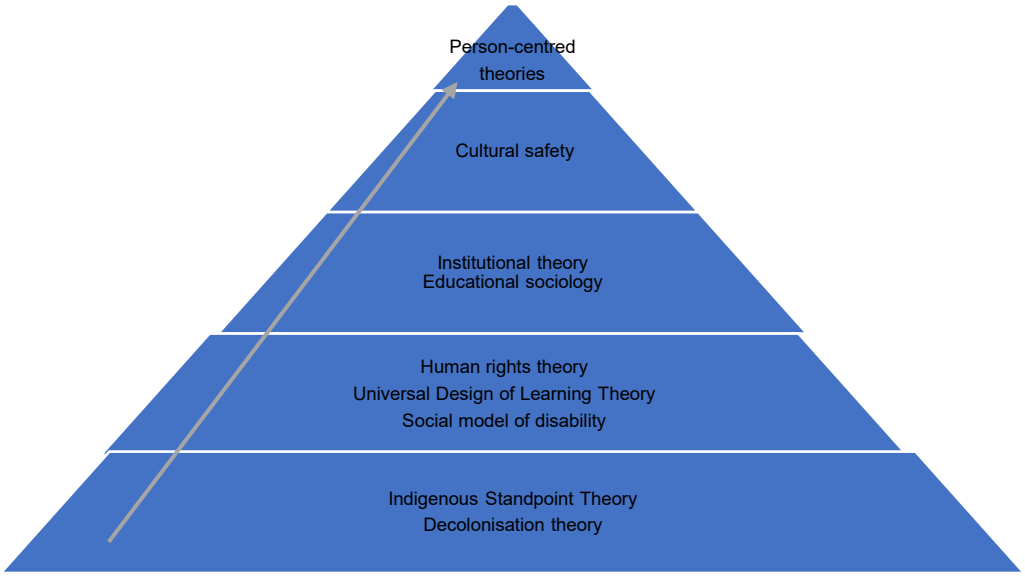

Figure 2.1

Theoretical Context (My way of Knowing) Informing the Conceptual Framework for the Research

Second, the theoretical context was distilled to several key concepts that form the conceptual framework (as outlined in Chapter Three), presenting a methodological model for conducting the research. When examining the approach taken to developing the conceptual framework, it is essential to note that the theoretical context underpinning it is multidisciplinary. Subsequently, an overview only of theories is presented to evidence the researcher's what of knowing prior to embarking on research activities. The purpose of the theoretical context is not to be an exhaustive analysis of each theory but rather a reflection of thought and growth prior to commencement of research activities.

2.2.2 Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Decolonisation Theory

Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) and decolonisation have been presented together in this theoretical context. As explained by Sherwood and Edwards (2006), 'decolonising processes require all individuals to explore their own assumptions and beliefs so that they can

be open to other ways of knowing, being, and doing. This change needs to be informed by Aboriginal people' (p. 189).

2.2.2.1 Indigenous Standpoint Theory

IST and decolonisation formed the foundational layer for the theoretical context. As a non-Aboriginal researcher, the first question I needed to answer was whether I should undertake this research? Should research such as this, which affects Indigenous people's lives, only be conducted by Indigenous researchers? In addressing this question, Dew et al. (2019) used the insider/outsider approach, whereby non-Indigenous researchers (the outsiders) walk side by side with Indigenous researchers (the insiders) towards a shared goal of improving the lives of the Indigenous people and their communities being researched. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, author of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, asks if any Indigenous researcher can truly be an insider because 'the role of research always positions you in a somewhat different space with different responsibilities, including ethical responsibilities and intellectual responsibilities, let alone managing relationship responsibilities if you are a researcher' (Smith et al. , 2019, p. 11)? This raises the question of power in a researcher–participant relationship and has provided learnings for this study. However, as a sole non-Aboriginal researcher, this Indigenous methodology is not appropriate.

Foley (2003) raised the subject of Indigenous Epistemology and IST in the context of wanting to provide an alternative research methodology and framework for Indigenous researchers. In undertaking his PhD, his concern was Indigenous researchers whose research activities were being frustrated and thwarted by being forced to accept Western, ethnocentric research methodology. He wanted to provide a meaningful alternative that would both scaffold and enable Indigenous scholars' research activities. IST was intended to be an Indigenous framework designed by an Indigenous scholar for Indigenous scholars. Foley (2003) provided

four criteria for practitioners to form the discussion basis for determining Indigenous standpoint. He stated that the practitioner must:

> Be Indigenous, well versed in social theory, critical sociology, post structuralism and post modernism … Indigenous research must be for the benefit of the researchers community or wider Indigenous community and/or Indigenous research community … wherever possible the traditional language should be the first form of recording. (p.50)

The work of Smith (2012) concurs with Foley's assertion (2003) that Indigenous research should only be conducted by Indigenous researchers. Historically, those termed 'white settler researchers' by Smith have approached research with Indigenous communities from a deficit perspective, misrepresenting findings and using them to reinforce colonising agendas. Smith (2012) states that:

> From an indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualisation of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialised forms of language, and structures of power. (p. 92)

Understandably, Indigenous communities and Indigenous academics see no place for the white researcher in this space. However, this stance does not consider the impact already had by Indigenous researchers on decolonising academic perspectives. Due to the decolonising actions and research conducted by Indigenous scholars using Indigenous methodologies, white researchers like myself are coming to this research field desiring to contribute to the decolonising agenda rather than to reinforce colonising norms. From my reading of Foley and Smith, it seemed there was no place for me to undertake this research as a non-Aboriginal woman.

If, as stated by Foley (2003) and Smith et al. (2019), Indigenous research is to be considered research conducted by Indigenous people, about Indigenous people and for the benefit of Indigenous people, then it could be concluded that this current research is not Indigenous research. It is agreed that no amount of reading or empathetic listening could provide the appropriate foundation for assuming that the researcher is accurately applying the lens of Indigenous experience to claim an Indigenous standpoint on their own merit. However, this PhD study concerned the interface of the higher education system with Indigenous students with a disability, conducted by a non-Aboriginal Australian with experience in the higher education sector. It sought to learn what the system could do to better support Indigenous students with a disability—it was not seeking change or action from the students. Thus, the title: White Questions—Black Answers.

In his PhD thesis, Gilroy (2009a), also an Indigenous scholar, developed a conceptual framework for research and policy development regarding Aboriginal people with a disability; in so doing, he merged IST with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (World Health Organization, 2001). In presenting his framework, Gilroy (2009a) attempted to provide a way for non-Indigenous scholars to adopt IST with the involvement and leadership of Indigenous people in the research process. He stated that 'non-Aboriginal researchers can adopt IST in their research regarding Aboriginal people only if Indigenous people were involved in the research process' (p. 129).

In developing his framework, Gilroy (2009b) embedded six criteria in the IST component, which speak directly to the non-Indigenous researcher. They are the need for Aboriginal Community inclusion in the research; for researchers to be well versed in influence and impact of European colonisation and dispossession of Aboriginal communities' traditional lands and cultures; for researchers to be part of the struggle for Aboriginal communities to be self-determining; to acknowledge the cultural interface that they bring to the research; the

similarities and differences between communities; and to use wherever possible local Indigenous languages (Gilroy, 2009b, p. 132).

Gilroy's (2009a) framework provides a way in for non-Indigenous researchers to examine systems and make them more responsive and effective to Indigenous students, clients and patients. If research to improve systems and decolonise policies and procedures is only to be conducted by Indigenous researchers, I take the view that this restraint itself becomes an instrument of colonisation. Global research on education and government systems is increasingly being undertaken by private consultancy firms (Gunter et al., 2014; KPMG, 2020). Without a framework that can be readily adopted, Indigenous standpoint risks being excluded from the process, in which case the colonisation agenda will prevail. Therefore, a framework within which white researchers can operate is crucial so that the research that they are conducting is culturally safe and overseen by Indigenous stakeholders. Safeguards must be in place to ensure that power remains with the Indigenous stakeholders. If Indigenous stakeholders oversee interpretations and outputs, the research remains set to benefit Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

Therefore, this study uses Gilroy's (2009a) IST, embracing the leadership and guidance of those with an Indigenous standpoint. This research was initiated after a request of myself from two Indigenous people with a disability who subsequently joined the Indigenous Advisory Group for this study's duration. Activities have been conducted under the guidance of an Indigenous scholar (nominated by one of the people who requested the research) and the Indigenous Advisory Group. I have not assumed the mantle of having an Indigenous standpoint; however, as a non-Aboriginal researcher, I have respectfully embraced oversight and guidance from those with an Indigenous standpoint.

2.2.2.2 Decolonisation Theory

As addressed in Chapter One, the Australian higher education sector has had its roots firmly grounded in colonisation since the 1850s. The first two Australian universities, the University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne, were established in the context of white settlers wanting to advance colonisation in this country (Taylor, 2000).

Reedy and Goff (2011) noted that 'the term "decolonisation" marks a turn, a halting or an intervening with ongoing colonisation' (p. 121). This research has had the core aim of identifying how the higher education sector can change its current practice to serve Indigenous students with a disability more effectively. Mechanisms of ongoing colonisation practise have been identified, as have practical measures and tools of decolonisation that can be offered to the sector to enable frontline teaching and support staff to mitigate the impact of colonisation (Sherwood & Edwards, 2006). One key recognition is that the responsibility rests with all staff in the higher education sector to act and interact in such a manner as to ensure that all Indigenous students flourish. As Bell (2014) explained, 'contemporary settler descendants and subsequent migrants may not be the generations that perpetrated the crimes of colonisation, but are the generations who choose to continue or address them' (p. 140). Decolonising the content of the curriculum, as discussed by Jansen (2019) in a South African context, lies beyond the scope of this research and has not been addressed.

2.2.3 Human Rights, Universal Design of Learning and the Social Model of Disability

Accessibility and inclusion, which UDL and the social model of disability (Gronseth & Dalton, 2020; Watson et al., 2012) both support and enable, were foundational principles in drafting the UNCRPD (2008). For this reason, they are presented together here with UDL and the social model of disability as mechanisms for honouring the human rights of Indigenous students with a disability who access the higher education sector.

This research has adopted a human rights approach. The human rights of individuals to access higher education has been recognised globally in conventions and law since 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated in Article 26(1) that 'technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit' (UN, 1948). In 1966, Australia ratified the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education with Article 4(a), which required governments to 'make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity' (UNESCO, 1960). Australia's commitment to the human rights of all its citizens to access to higher education was further confirmed with the ratification of the UNCRPD in 2008. Article 24(5) stated that:

> State Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities. (UN, 2006)

Therefore, this research has embraced the human rights of responsibility theory, as proposed by Ackerly (2018), where human rights are 'not merely a goal, but also a way of working toward that goal. A human rights theory of political responsibility outlines a way of taking action; it does not merely theorise about the desired consequences of an action' (p. 3). Appendix H outlines conventions and Australian laws articulating the human rights and legal imperative to provide access to higher education for Indigenous students and students with a disability.

2.2.3.1 Universal Design of Learning as a Means of Meeting Human Rights and Legal Imperatives for Providing Equity of Access to Higher Education

UDL has been a global response to the need to ensure universal access to information and education for those with a disability who rely on AT. Lang et al. (2021) explained that 'AT

is specifically used to enable students with disability to access the same materials and environments as students without disability' (p. 53). ATs, such as text-to-speech and Braille readers, require learning materials to be formatted so that the AT can access the text. For example, learning materials delivered in an image-based format cannot be accessed by a screen reader that converts the text to speech or a Braille reader that converts the text to Braille. However, learning materials delivered in a text format such as a Word document enable the students using AT full and equitable access to the learning materials (see Figure 2.2).

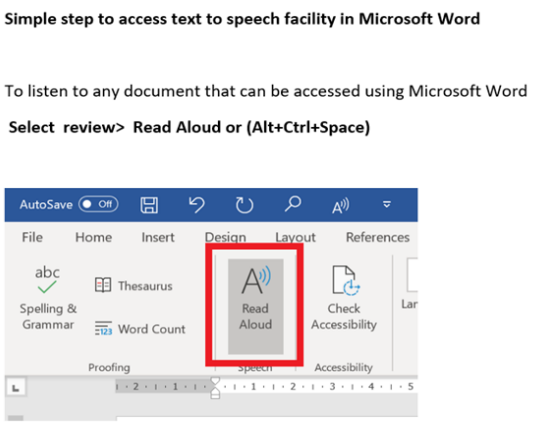

Figure 2.2

Example of Accessing Assistive Technologies Embedded in the Majority of Proprietary Software and Personal Use Technologies

Note: These can only be used if UDL principles have been applied.

UDL has its roots in the accessibility movement. As an educational framework based on research in learning science, it guides the design and development of inclusive education systems globally for all age and ability cohorts. International UDL Guidelines, informed by over 800 peer-reviewed research papers, were published in 2012 (Bracken & Novak, 2019).

UDL guidelines have been directly endorsed into US legislation with the 2008 *Higher Education Opportunity Act* (Novak & Thibodeau, 2016). In Australia, access barriers for

people with a disability and UDL principles in mitigating these have been recognised and addressed under the DDA (1992) and the supporting *Education Standards* (DESE, 2005). Additionally, Australia has obligations as a signatory to the UNCRPD that has dedicated the entire Article (9) to accessibility with explicit reference to ATs and alternative formats throughout the convention (UN, 2008). In Australia, since December 2014, it has been a mandatory requirement of all government offices and agencies to ensure the accessibility of their online communications and facilities (Australian Government, n.d.).

Rose and Meyer (2012), pioneers of UDL, have stated that UDL is necessary because 'barriers to learning are not, in fact, inherent in the capacities of learners, but instead arise in learners' interactions with inflexible educational materials and methods' (p. iv). UDL involves the following principles:

- providing flexibility in how students access the learning experience without reliance on a sensory capacity such as seeing or hearing
- development and delivery of learning materials in such a manner that ATs can access them
- flexibility with assessment methods to suit the strengths of the learner (CAST, 2018).

Kieran and Anderson (2018) and Fritzgerald and Rice (2020) have highlighted that UDL and the flexibility that it brings to curriculum design, delivery and assessment is now being adopted successfully as an anti-racism tool in teaching and learning institutions. Therefore, UDL is an essential component of both the theoretical context and conceptual framework for this study, as are the human rights and legal imperatives to facilitate equity of access to higher education for Indigenous students with a disability. Provision of access is a legal and ethical and human rights responsibility, rather than a kindness.

2.2.3.2 Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability was used alongside the human rights model in shaping the UNCRPD—the two theories are often used interchangeably (Lawson & Beckett, 2020). As a complementary model or subset of the human rights model, the social model described in the preamble to the UNCRPD departs from the medical model of identifying disability according to the individual's medical characteristics. It states that 'disability … results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (UN, 2008). The social model of disability, which relates to human rights, forms an essential component of this study's theoretical context. This research has been designed and executed, as suggested in the UNCRPD, to identify the interaction between the Indigenous students with disabilities and the attitudinal and environmental barriers of the higher education sector that hinders their full and effective participation on an equal basis with others (UN, 2008). This is particularly appropriate in light of the Indigenous perspective on disability that does not label people by their disability.

In debating the various disability models, Shakespeare (2004) stated that an analysis using the social model 'shows the key priorities for action: barrier removal; citizenship rights; anti-discrimination legislation. The SSM (social model of disability) mandates structural change in society, rather than medical or psychological correction of individuals' (p. 11). Shakespeare further debated this model's incompleteness, describing it as more of a tool in a toolbox than a complete model, as it does not address all disabilities or individuals' perceptions of their disability or need for medical interventions. However, for the context of this research, with a focus on access to education and training, the social model's focus on barrier removal is highly relevant.

2.2.4 Institutional Theory and Educational Sociology

These two areas have been linked due to their central role in actioning change to enhance access and inclusion. Institutional theory concerns the leadership, management and culture of the educational institutions (Furusten, 2013); educational sociology concerns the educational and social actions of the institutions and their impact (Saha, 2001). Therefore, these theories dovetail neatly with one another. Institutional theories provide the impetus and structures to enable change; educational sociology informs the design, delivery and curriculum assessment to action the change and the subsequent outcomes for all students.

2.2.4.1 Institutional Theory

The rationale for including a history of the higher education sector in this thesis was based on providing background and possibly explaining the barriers created for Indigenous students by policies and procedures of colonisation embodied in longstanding institutional bias. Johnson (2007) has explained the theory of institutional bias, describing a process of organisational imprinting, which claims that organisations adopt the culture and values of their society that existed at the time of formation. This culture is then imprinted throughout the generations, with people understanding what is expected of them without explicit direction being given, resulting in what can be described as institutional bias and institutional values. When institutional bias affects the development and implementation of institutional policies and procedures, the systemic exclusion of people according to race, age, gender or ability may occur. It is for this reason that institutional bias is a component of this theoretical context. Through adopting institutional bias, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff may unwittingly become agents of colonisation. Institutional bias encompasses all of the ‘isms’—racism, ableism, ageism and sexism, among others—that are perpetuated throughout institutions to maintain the status quo. In examining racism in the higher education sector, Law (2016) stated that:

> Many academics, university administrators and Vice Chancellors also fail to grasp the significance and power of racism in their own organisations and practices and lack the motivation and creativity necessary to respond to this challenge. (p. 333)

Institutional bias is insidious as it can be superficially justified by claiming that *it is just the way things have always been*; further, it is often a source of pride for those finding themselves on the side of power. In their work on erasing institutional bias, Jana and Mejias (2018) noted that bias thrives in an environment of homogeneity, thereby explaining why Australian universities, long the bastion of white middle-class males, may be inflicted by its stain.

Additionally, as presented in Chapter One, the privatisation of the higher education system and the commodification of education have shifted the sector from a paradigm of social good to one of managerialism and commercialism. Therefore, institutional theory is a necessary component of this theoretical context. The value proposition or reputational advantages available for higher education providers who increase the representation of Indigenous students with a disability becomes a consideration under the umbrella of institutional theory. As for any organisation or business, projected values are a key differentiator in determining the content and scope of external engagements. Gottschalk (2011) has explained that 'knowledge-based organisations such as education seem extremely dependent on a good reputation to attract customers and clients' and reputation is an 'intangible corporate asset that is important for its competitiveness' (p. 29). Reputational advantages go beyond student enrolments to attracting financial support through government grants, corporate sponsorships and philanthropy. To illustrate this point, the University of Sydney received $10.6 million in philanthropic gifts in 2020 to fund an Indigenous health education initiative (University of Sydney, 2020).

In their research on goal congruence between ethical leadership and institutional culture, Bouckenooghe et al. (2014) observed that:

> Ethical leaders, through their caring style, transparent information sharing style, and high moral values, are likely to be seen as trustworthy and attractive role models who promote identification with the organisation by conveying values and goals that resonate with their followers' goals and values. With their proactive actions aimed at encouraging high moral standards, ethical leaders are more likely to have a major influence on the values internalised by followers. Because of their perceived credibility and attractiveness as role models, ethical leaders arouse a collective sense of mission. (p. 252)

Strong ethical leadership, which sees the value proposition for their organisations in correcting current inequalities and barriers for Indigenous students with a disability to engage with higher education, will be vital to effecting change in the higher education sector.

2.2.4.2 Educational Sociology

Educational sociology reveals the impact of factors on people's lives and society more broadly. When describing the role of educational sociology, Saha (2001) stated that 'educational sociology focuses attention on the social factors that both cause and are caused by education' (p. 289). Saha also explained that theories emerging from Marx, Durkheim and Weber all concern reinforcing social class structures through education. An understanding of the impact of positive and negative interactions in the education setting, where those with power attribute value to others and deem them either worthy or unworthy of support and inclusion, is drawn from educational sociology scholarship.

In an educational environment, ableism is closely linked to 'othering'—it implies the superiority of people without a disability and the inability of those with a disability. Campbell (2012) has explained that an 'ableist viewpoint is a belief that impairment or disability (irrespective of "type") is inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured or indeed eliminated' (p. 5). How teaching and support staff respond to

Indigenous students with a disability—in an environment that has traditionally been preserved for the most able—is relevant to this research. Bevan-Brown (2013) investigated ableism in Indigenous communities, highlighting that it is not a concept confined to mainstream communities. Indigenous people and communities can, and in many cases do, hold ableist attitudes towards people with a disability. Therefore, Indigenous staff, by implication, could also hold ableist perspectives. As stated by Lang and Spitzer (2020), discrimination and bias in the form of ableism and attitudes of limited expectations, particularly at the intersection of racism and sexism, on the part of those in positions of power shape outcomes for individuals. Therefore, discrimination and bias is central to this theoretical context.

2.2.5 Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is a concept that has its roots in New Zealand; it was developed by nurses seeking to serve better their Maori patients and communities (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2011). Cultural safety is not cultural awareness or cultural sensitivity, where there is one-way acknowledgement and acceptance of another's culture as a separate curiosity; rather, it is a higher-order outcome that enables safe service to be defined by those who use the service.

Cultural safety first requires staff to reflect on their personal history, attitudes, manner and impact on others. Second, cultural safety requires practitioners to engage with the lived history of the people they are employed to serve. Third, cultural safety embeds respect for Indigenous people and respect for the individual. A campus where cultural safety is practised will convey a uniform attitude of respect for Indigenous students, their families, their communities, their history and their ways of doing and knowing (Fryberg et al., 2013; Harrison, 2011; Rahman, 2013). Therefore, it will be equipped to build support services and programs for Indigenous students who may have a cultural perspective on disability that differs from the institutional colonised viewpoint.

As part of their Aboriginal Cultural Safety Initiative, rolled out in colleges and universities throughout Ontario (Canada), from 2011 to 2013 with 1,500 students, Shah and Reeves (2015) identified four key features of cultural safety:

- First, cultural safety is inclusive of cultural competency (which includes having an understanding of colonial history; having an awareness of cultural differences; being culturally sensitive; and refining one's skills, knowledge, and attitudes).
- Second, cultural safety emphasises relationship building by creating an environment of respect, acceptance, trust, caring, and empathy.
- Third, cultural safety employs a social justice lens to considering power imbalances in society and seeks to empower Aboriginal clients and communities in terms of advocacy and political power sharing.
- Fourth, it is the client (student) themself who determines whether the care they have received has been culturally safe (p. 119).

Therefore, cultural safety is a living initiative within institutions that extends beyond communications between individuals and the acquisition of new knowledge. In the context of this research, cultural safety calls on institutions to truly listen to Indigenous students with a disability. Therefore, cultural safety was considered core to this study's theoretical context and conceptual framework.

2.2.6 Person-Centred Support

Person-centredness was introduced by Carl Rogers in the 1940s and 1950s as a framework for therapists to engage with their patients. He sought to remove the hierarchy and power from professional and client relationships. As Biles (2016) explained, 'Rogers' approach to therapy constitutes a challenge and threat to both internal and external authority, hierarchy and exclusiveness' (p. 333). Through their thematic analysis of the literature on PC support, Waters and Buchanan (2017) produced seven core themes:

1. honouring the person
2. being in a relationship
3. facilitating participation and engagement
4. social inclusion/citizenship
5. experiencing compassionate love
6. being strengths/capacity focused
7. organisational characteristics.

These themes focus on taking the time—as one person to another—to listen, care and use all capacity to support the individual. In short, individuals matter, making this a vital component of this study's theoretical context and conceptual framework. In the context of this theoretical context, as a researcher, I was cognisant of honouring the participants, their history, their language and the lens through which they view the world.

As discussed in Chapter One, the marketisation of higher education has created a new lexicon that terms students as 'consumers' or 'clients' (Strhan, 2010). This shift has accompanied the international growth and promotion of education as a commodity. In the context of a PC approach to teaching and supporting students, students' commodification as consumers has had various impacts on the traditional pedagogical relationship of care between staff and students. Barnett, cited in Molesworth et al. (2011), explained the nature of the positive pedagogical relationship that is at stake with this paradigm shift:

> For in the pedagogical relationship in higher education, the teacher has an eye to the personally edifying properties of an authentic learning experience on the part of the student. Authentic encounters with a disciplinary or professional field can yield a transformation in the student (such that students on graduation day may be heard to say that 'this course has changed my life'). (p. 47)

The theoretical context and conceptual framework for this research embraced the value of the individual and the belief in teaching and support staff to make a substantive difference in students' lives. Further, it held fast to a belief in the higher education sector's 'potential for cultural leadership and forging new academic and societal values' (Barnett & Fulford, 2020, p. 5).

2.3 Summary

This chapter has provided the theoretical context - *my way of knowing*, that informed the development of the conceptual framework – *my way of doing* (presented in Chapter Three). It demonstrated that this research draws on theories from multiple disciplines. By providing an overview of the theories, an insight to the researcher's thinking regarding the complexity of the forces at play leading to the exclusion of Indigenous students with a disability in the Australian Higher Education Sector is provided. Figure 2.1 illustrated the theoretical context in a pyramid indicating a hierarchy of theories that needed consideration by the researcher. At its very base is IST and decolonising theories. As a non-Aboriginal researcher these were paramount theories with which to engage. In 2.2.2 the question of whether or not a non-Aboriginal researcher should be undertaking this research, the role of IST and maintaining Indigenous authority in research conducted by a non-Aboriginal researcher was addressed. Coupling this at its base is the forces of colonisation and the theories of decolonisation.

Proceding up the pyramid illustrated in Figure 2.1, this chapter visited in sequence the theories of human rights theory and associated Universal Design of Learning (UDL) theory and the social model of disability theory, presented together as they represent the legal, moral and ethical imperatives for inclusive education. Next educational sociology and institutional theory presented together as they provide the theoretical context for social and institutional change. This was followed by theories of cultural safety and person-centredness (PC), as they

represent the interface with Indigenous participants by a non-Indigenous researcher. These two theories sit at the top of the pyramid to exemplify a readiness for undertaking research.

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Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework – *my way of doing* – and Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the research methods applied to seek an answer to the central research question:

> How can the higher education sector effectively support and scaffold the success of Indigenous students with a disability and assure their human rights to equity of access to higher education and the life opportunities that it provides?

This chapter comprises four sections. First, it describes the conceptual framework framing this research, based on the theoretical context presented in Chapter Two. Second, it details the methods used as a non-Indigenous researcher to ensure that the research was grounded in IST and respectfully conducted under the authority of Indigenous research principles. Third, it explains the method adopted for each of the research phases. These methods are accompanied by a critical analysis of other methods, providing a rationale for choosing the method described and, finally, the procedures for each research activity. The chapter concludes with a summary of the overall methodological approach.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical context of this study, as described in Chapter Two, incorporated theories from which a core set that recognised Indigenous authority were selected to develop the study's conceptual framework. In turn, this framework has provided a theoretical scaffold for the methodology that reflects the oversight and authority of those with an Indigenous standpoint.

It also depicts the concept of my self and my place as a non-Aboriginal researcher undertaking this research.

This conceptual framework has guided all research activities, including data collection, analysis and validation of conclusions reached with findings and recommendations. It provided a tool against which I could scrutinise all activities and methods. The conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1) is presented in a five-circle format, illustrating the relationship hierarchy model implemented within the study.

Layer 1: The first outer circle (layer) represents those with an Indigenous standpoint (namely the Indigenous Advisory Group and my primary supervisor) and the criteria for IST, as presented by Gilroy (2009a). This layer of the framework encompassed all activities undertaken in this research.

Layer 2: The second layer represents human rights and legal imperatives for Indigenous students with a disability to have equity of access to higher education. This is the concept that drove this research and guided the analysis of results and recommendations.

Layer 3: The third layer is cultural safety. This concept guided the methodology of all activities and interactions for this research.

Layer 4: This layer represents the research activities themselves.

Layer 5: At the core of this framework is the researcher, with arrows representing two-way communication between the IST oversight on the outer layer and the researcher at the centre.

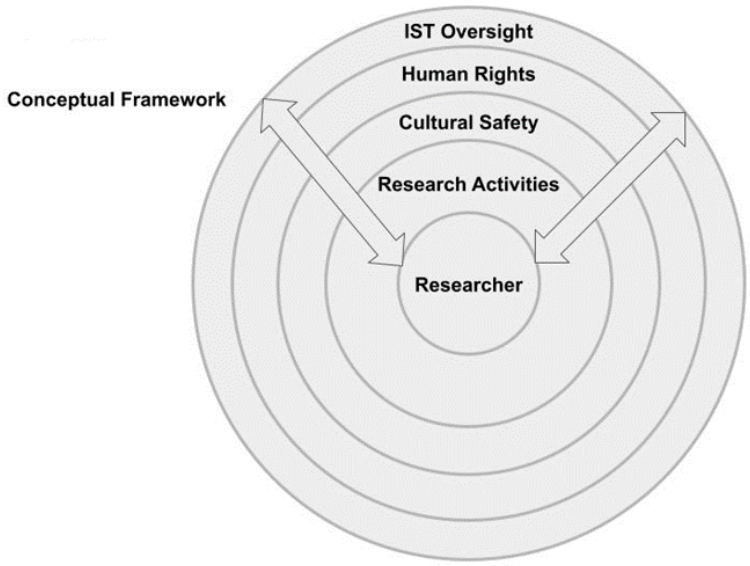

Figure 3.1

Conceptual Framework for all Research Activities Undertaken

It was against this conceptual framework that I considered research methodologies for this research and decided the best course of action.

3.2.1 Approaching the Research as a Non-Indigenous Researcher

Figure 3.1 illustrates the conceptual framework for this research, with the outer layer symbolising the study's oversight by those with an Indigenous standpoint and the third layer symbolising cultural safety. I was introduced to cultural safety principles in research and practice while undertaking a Masters of Indigenous Education (taught by Indigenous academics) at Macquarie University. I was introduced to IST principles and the necessity for oversight by people with an Indigenous standpoint through Gilroy (2009a & b).

In response to this learning, this research has been:

- supervised and led by an Australian Indigenous academic who is recognised nationally for their work in Indigenous health and disability, thereby ensuring that

research activities undertaken have been mindful of and informed by someone with an Indigenous standpoint

- informed, guided and validated by an Indigenous Advisory Group
- supported by an Indigenous cultural broker, who attended all interviews.

3.2.1.1 Role of Indigenous Advisory Group With Indigenous Standpoint

The Advisory Group comprised three Aboriginal people with lived experience of disability: Roslyn Sackley, Maria Robinson and Naomi Carolin. Two meetings held in the initial stages of the research and one held upon completion of the research included Naomi Carolin and ongoing communications and meetings threaded throughout the research period involved Roslyn Sackley and Maria Robinson. Their role in this research was as supportive peers guiding the embedding of Indigenous standpoint throughout this research. The Advisory Group's involvement was crucial in securing participation by Indigenous people with a disability who had undertaken higher education and laying the foundations for trust and open and honest communications. The Advisory Group was also crucial in validating the research findings.

3.2.1.2 Role of the Cultural Broker With an Indigenous Standpoint

Ethics approval to employ a cultural broker to be involved in this research project was gained from the University of Sydney in September 2016 (Approval number: 2016/751). Roslyn Sackley was employed in this role and was present for all interviews. Roslyn Sackley is a Nyiampaa and Wiradjuri woman with total vision loss due to meningitis as an infant. Roslyn has taught in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales primary, senior secondary, TAFE and university sectors. As a cultural broker, she did not ask any research questions, comment on responses or participate in data collation or analysis. The purpose of her role was to:

- ensure the embedding of cultural safety into the data collection process

- improve the power balance in the interview process in favour of the interviewee
- have an Aboriginal person in the session to provide: i) empathy and cultural support to the interviewee, ii) feedback for better ways of doing to the researcher and iii) reassurance of the efficacy and purpose of the research for the participants.

3.2.1.3 Seeking to Serve: Path-up Scholarship

Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) prescribed innovative and imaginative research methods and introduced the path-up scholarship methodology. Path-up scholarship proposes the challenging of existing frameworks and the use of alternative methodologies. It refers to a process of immersion of the researcher, who questions themselves, their values, their bias and the applicability of standard research methods rather than following research conventions to secure acceptance. They state that, as researchers, we should be:

> Committed to …. ideas we care about rather than focusing on what our publications will do for our image, our compensation, or our careers. That is, we need less instrumental gap-spotting and publication-prioritising sub-specialists working for a long time only within one area, and more researchers with a broader outlook, curious, reflective, willing and able to question their own frameworks and consider alternative positions, and eager to produce new insights at the risk of some short-term instrumental sacrifices, that is, a more critical and path-(up)setting scholarship mode. (p. 143)

Similar to decolonisation methodologies, including UDL, cultural safety, PC and social inclusion, the research focus of path-up scholarship is on those whom it serves rather than the system. Charbonneau-Dahlen (2020), an Indigenous American researcher, developed Symbiotic Allegory as Innovative Indigenous Research Methodology that combined traditional Indigenous storytelling with Western research methods. Charbonneau-Dahlen affirmed the ‘importance of creating methodologies that incorporate the ways of knowing of the group being studied’, facilitated by ‘a member of the group being studied who is able to collect data in a

respectful and culturally harmonious way for the purpose of disseminating the research' (p. 35). Careful, supportive, creative, purposeful and responsive are descriptors for these methods of innovative research. It is with this approach that I undertook this research as a non-Aboriginal woman. I did not commence this research with an established methodology to guide research activities; instead, I responded iteratively with methods compatible with the conceptual framework provided in Figure 3.1 and appropriate for collecting the required data.

3.3 Mixed Methods Convergent Parallel Design With Triangulation of Data

The act of inquiry has driven the utilisation of elements of mixed research methods to discover new knowledge. A single research methodology has not been chosen and used to guide the structure of the research.

As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the methodology applied to this research is a mixed methods convergent parallel design, including triangulation of data, results and analysis from all datasets. As described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the mixed methods convergent parallel methodology used in this research involved collecting and analysing distinct datasets: two quantitative data collection activities in Track One and a qualitative data collection activity in Track Two. Following the collection and analysis of the unique datasets, I compared and identified relationships between the results and drew a final interpretation of the combined analysis. The combined analysis was presented to the Indigenous Advisory Group, as a group of specialists, at the last validation meeting.

Triangulation is not a new concept. Webb (2006) raised the issue of triangulation in 1970, stating that 'the most persuasive evidence and the strongest inference comes from a triangulation of measurement processes' (p. 450). Triangulation is implied in the 'convergent' descriptor of the thesis methodology; however, triangulation involves more than bringing studies together and reporting on the findings of each. It suggests a process of cross-validation from the findings and analysis of one dataset to the findings and analysis of another. When

added to the research methodology, it forms an acknowledgement that the research conclusions are more likely to be validated if the question at hand has been examined in different ways by different studies—with the interests of those it serves at its core. Since the work of Webb, cross-disciplinary researchers have proposed the use of triangulation as a means of validating multiple datasets (see e.g., Flick, 2017; Hoque et al., 2013; Knafi & Gallo, 1995; Malamatidou, 2018).

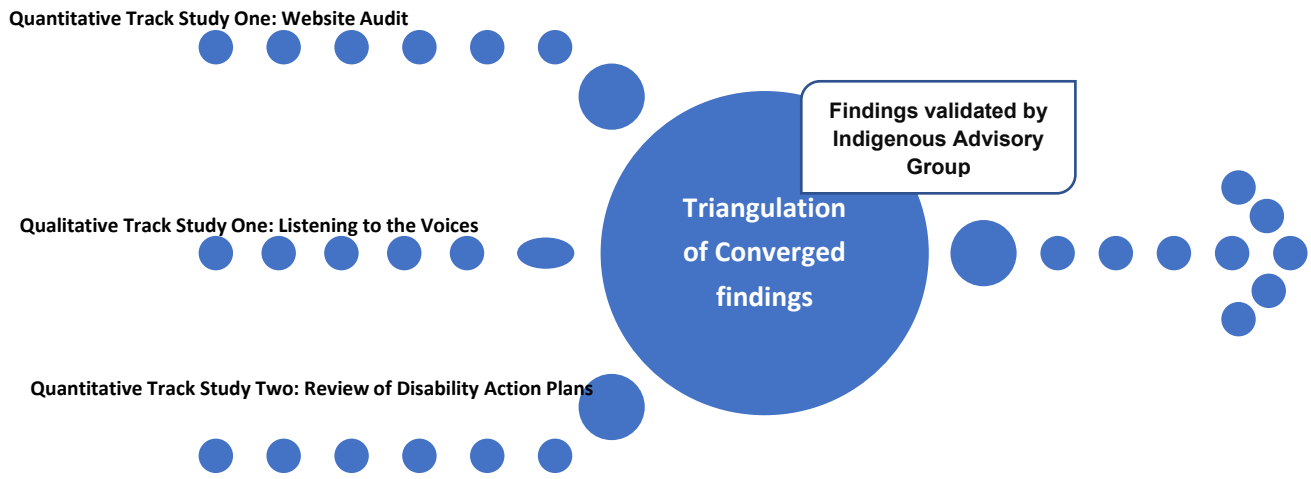

Figure 3.2

Mixed Methods Parallel Convergent Design With Quantitative Track Studies One and Two and Qualitative Track Study One

The Quantitative Track of this research involved two quantitative data collection activities:

1. Study One: an audit of Australian websites for the development and implementation of an instrument to identify support and services available to Indigenous students with a disability throughout all Australian universities
2. Study Two: the collection of the third source of data from a review conducted in 2020 of DAPs for the same 40 universities whose websites were audited in 2016.

The Qualitative Track of this research involved:

3. Study One: Listening to the voices—collecting and analysing the personal stories of five Indigenous people with a disability who have personal lived experience of undertaking higher education in Australia.

As illustrated in Figure 3.3, for each of these Tracks, I constructed a secondary research question to provide the data necessary to answer the central research question. The Quantitative Track, comprising Studies One and Two, addressed the following research question: What are universities doing to support Indigenous students with a disability? Qualitative Track Study One addressed the following research question: What lessons can be learned from listening to the stories of Indigenous people with a disability who have lived experience in navigating the Australian higher education sector?

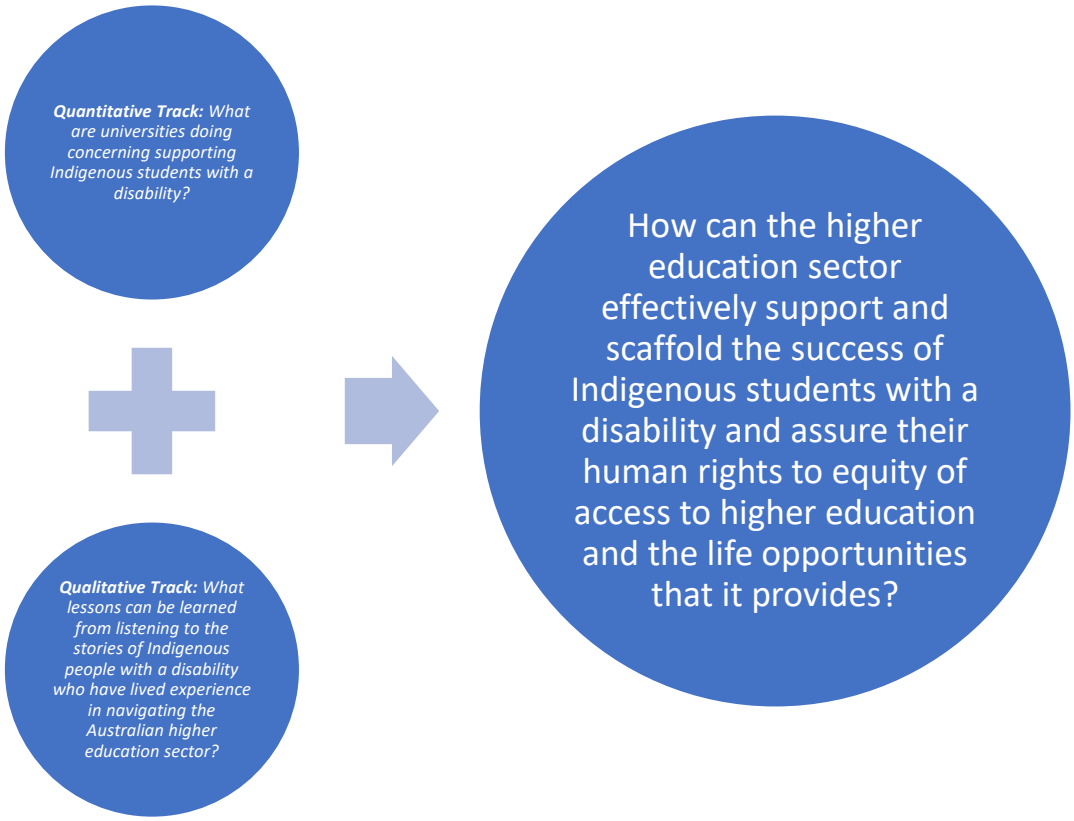

Figure 3.3

Research Questions for Quantitative Track and Qualitative Track Studies and the Central Thesis Research Question

The research methods and reasoning for each of these components follows.

3.3.1 Methods for Quantitative Track Studies One and Two

3.3.1.1 Quantitative Track Study One: Audit of University Websites

Using what Lee (2019) has termed 'unobtrusive online data', this investigation audited 40 Australian university websites. Data collected was on the macro level of institution public information and communications, including policies and procedures but not individual student records or access data. The 2016 national census revealed that 'nearly three quarters (72%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households had at least one person access(ing) the internet' (ABS, 2018a). Further, Indigenous visual literacy is a vital part of the 'cultural Indigenous learning systems that take place within the family and community' (Zizys, 2010).

These two factors support the premise that, in the absence of generational exposure to higher education where information would otherwise be forthcoming from family and community, Indigenous students with a disability might turn to university websites as a repository of information. The Indigenous Advisory Group supported this premise.

Visual content analysis of websites is being used increasingly as a research methodology in the areas of sociological, anthropological and communications research, to identify priorities and messages that are delivered by companies and institutions to their clients and constituents (see e.g., Carneiro & Johnson, 2014; Johnson & Pettiway, 2017; Le Peau et al., 2017; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014; Tang, 2011; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013).

Pauwels (2012) has captured the research opportunities that websites provide, stating that:

> Web phenomena, and websites in particular, are unique expressions of contemporary culture, and as such they constitute a huge repository of potential data about contemporary ways of doing and thinking of large groups of people across ethnic and national boundaries. (p. 247)

Pauwels (2005, 2012, 2015), a pioneer in this research area, developed a framework that has proved seminal to subsequent scientific research analysing websites, particularly concerning the meaning behind visual representations. Much thought goes into the structure, content and form of an institutional website. Analysis of data collected in this manner provides insight into the actual rather than stated priorities of organisations at a particular time. Websites and their navigational structure can be viewed as the markers of 'the standpoints of view and implied voice and audience' that an institution communicates to and for (Carneiro & Johnson, 2014, p. 4). A review of various sector websites is an emerging methodology for identifying service delivery (see e.g., Reneau et al., 2018; Saichaie & Warshaw, 2017; Stagg et al., 2018).

In selecting and building the methodology for this research, I considered using a survey method with a questionnaire to be sent to the higher education sector in the various states and territories, including TAFEs, private RTOs and universities. This approach was discarded as a possible methodology for the following five reasons:

1. The combined number of TAFEs, RTOs and universities numbers is just under 5,000 providers. The three categories of providers each come under different regulatory systems and have different internal organisations. For this reason, I decided to limit the research to universities only as they are all funded by the Commonwealth Government, have similar structures and present a homogenous group from which to draw comparisons in practice.
2. In limiting the research for this study to universities, it was difficult to establish to whom, within each university, the survey should be sent. For example, if sent to the Indigenous unit, there was no guarantee that they would collaborate with the disability unit.
3. It was recognised that returned questionnaires might not present an accurate picture of the services being provided to Indigenous students with a disability. I may only receive responses from universities wanting to promote their own institution.
4. A questionnaire would assume a current understanding by the university of the Indigenous perspective on disability. It would also assume that they had processes to capture data on Indigenous students with undeclared or undiagnosed disabilities.
5. A questionnaire would collect data from an insider perspective, knowing all systems, not from the perspective of a potential Indigenous student trying to discover information about available programs and supports.

These five considerations culminated in concerns against which Curtis and Drennan (2013) had cautioned, in their text on health research methods, regarding challenges associated with conducting surveys. They indicated that:

- There can be problems with both the internal and external validity of survey results due to respondents bias and non-response to the survey.
- The reliability of data can be undermined by respondents in different roles across institutions responding.

Fleming and Grace (2016) conducted such a survey in the same year that I conducted the audit of university websites, examining the support needs of Indigenous students with a disability in the higher education sector. In their findings, they stated that 'despite being distributed to all universities (using multiple postings) throughout Australia, responses were only received from 17 disability units' (p. 54). They also noted that surveys were sent to all Indigenous support units, and only two responded. Their experience has confirmed that the approach I took has netted richer data to analyse and use as a component in this research.

In comparison with the concerns expressed by Curtis and Drennan (2013) and Fleming and Grace (2016), this audit identified website content regarding support and services, the nature and connectivity of these services across each campus and the promoted policies and procedures for delivering these supports and services. 'Click number' was included to indicate how easily information could be accessed from the home page of each website. As a researcher, when the information was not readily available, I used multiple search techniques that would not necessarily be intuitive to first-time users. Examples of these techniques include clicking on the Aboriginal flag icons to see if they provided a link to information and using the institution's organisational chart to determine where various services reside. Once I found the information, I performed reverse navigation to establish the quickest route to the information for someone familiar with the site and recorded that as the click rate. So, while using some user

experience research principles, this was not user experience research; instead, it was content analysis, in line with constructing and utilising Pauwels' (2012) inventory of salient features.

3.3.1.2 Quantitative Track Study Two: Review of University Disability Action Plans

Study Two adopted the same methodology as Study One in that it reviewed DAPs that were available online. Educational institutions, defined as service providers under Part 3 of the DDA (1992), are invited to submit DAPs to the AHRC. These action plans include all information from the service provider regarding what the institution is doing and planning to do to enhance access for people with a disability. It provides insight into an institution's strategic focus concerning inclusiveness and support of students and staff with a disability. The AHRC states that 'in the event of a complaint, the Commission is required by the DDA to consider the organisation's action plan' (AHRC, 2020), thereby providing universities with a strong legal compliance incentive for developing, lodging and implementing a DAP.

Below is an excerpt from the DDA (1992), Part 3, Section 61: Provisions of Action Plans:

> The action plan of a service provider must include provisions relating to:
>
> a) the devising of policies and programs to achieve the objects of this Act; and
> b) the communication of these policies and programs to persons within the service provider; and
> c) the review of practices within the service provider with a view to the identification of any discriminatory practices; and
> d) the setting of goals and targets, where these may reasonably be determined against which the success of the plan in achieving the objects of the Act may be assessed; and

e) the means, other than those referred to in paragraph (d), of evaluating the policies and programs referred to in paragraph (a); and

f) the appointment of persons within the service provider to implement the provisions referred to in paragraphs (a) to (e)(inclusive).

I undertook the DAPs review in December 2020 for the same 40 universities whose websites I audited in 2016. In undertaking this review, I sought to identify the current state of disability support within Australian universities. I wanted to know whether universities had implemented DAPs that were inclusive of Indigenous students with a disability. The aim was to determine if the findings of the first two studies were still current, relevant and significant for supporting Indigenous students with a disability. In undertaking this review, I collected data for each university under the following five questions:

1. Do they have a DAP?
2. Does the DAP mention Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with a disability?
3. Is there evidence of participation of Indigenous students or staff in the development of the plan and, if so, what is the nature of their involvement (e.g., is mention limited to the introduction of the plan or does it indicate that the DAP was constructed in partnership with Indigenous groups within each university?)?
4. Do the DAPs cover transition to employment?
5. What year was the plan implemented?

In locating the DAPs, I checked both the AHRC dedicated website page for university DAPs and, where they were not present, I undertook a search of the university websites.

3.3.1.3 Recognised Limitation of Methodology for Quantitative Track Study One

A core limitation of the methodology applied for Study One is that one researcher undertook the audit of 40 university websites. Therefore, I could not record data on how long

website users spent searching the website, how long they spent on each page or whether they found the website's information regarding support and services. Therefore, this audit identified website content regarding support and services, the nature and connectivity of these services across each campus and the promoted policies and procedures for delivering these supports and services. Analysis and findings for this study are provided in Chapter Four.

3.3.2 Methods for Qualitative Track Study One: Listening to the Voices

The emphasis for data collection was on providing the opportunity for Indigenous people with a disability who have engaged with the higher education sector to tell their stories and share their experiences of such engagement across Australia. Crucial to this study was securing participants who undertook studies in the Australian higher education sector and identified as both an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and a person with a disability. The five participants secured for this study had all attempted higher education at multiple institutions in three states and two territories. All participants reported their experiences with at least three different institutions.

I used traditional Indigenous storytelling methodology to collect the personal accounts of the five participants and analyse the resulting data. Datta (2017) observed that 'traditional storytelling as a research method links Indigenous worldviews, shaping the research approach; the theoretical context and conceptual framework; and the epistemology, methodology, and ethics' (p. 35). In their work with Indigenous research in the Alaskan context, Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) both cited the central place of storytelling in Indigenous knowledges globally and emphasised the importance of moving Indigenous epistemologies to the centre of Western research. The central positioning of the stories of the five participants in this research aimed to achieve this.

Snowball sampling was used as the methodology for recruitment of participants, using the researcher's networks and the Indigenous Advisory Group. Snowball sampling is a method

used when standard sampling from a specific population is impossible (Handcock & Gile, 2011). Indigenous Australians with a disability who have lived experience in undertaking study in universities or TAFEs across Australia is such a specific population that standard sampling was not possible. In their work on research methods in nursing and midwifery, Johnson et al. (2014) recognised snowball sampling, purposive sampling and networking as the most appropriate methods to use when recruiting participants for research about the lived experience of any phenomena. They defined snowballing or chain sampling as 'involv[ing] starting with one or two participants and then relying on them to identify and refer the researcher to other potential participants who meet the inclusion criteria for the study' (p. 364). One advantage of this methodology is that it selects participants who have had the interactions and experiences being researched. A disadvantage is that they may not comprise a representative sample, leading to poor qualitative results (Beauchemin & González-Ferrier, 2011). This disadvantage has been mitigated in this present study by validating findings against literature and the other research components, using the convergence and triangulation of findings from all three data sources.

3.3.2.1 Alternative Method Considered for Qualitative Track Study One

Magnusson and Marecek (2015) explained that, in conducting qualitative research interviews (that they label as interpretive research), it is good practice to prepare an interview guide before commencing interviews with participants, to ensure that you ask a consistent set of questions. I considered this approach but was concerned that the data collected would be limited by my understanding of the issues prior to commencing the interviews. I also felt that this approach would shift the power from the participant to myself as the researcher. If I set the agenda, the methodology would not fit within the conceptual framework for the research (as illustrated in Figure 3.1). Further, it would have shifted the dynamics, with the participants trying to respond to my questions rather than simply sharing their story.

Figure 3.4 represents how the conceptual framework was applied to the interviews, again illustrating the power relationship between the researcher and the participants. The image shows three concentric circles—the researcher is represented as the smallest inner circle. The next circle represents the participant and the cultural broker together (i.e., the cultural broker is there to support the participant, not the researcher), with a two-way line leading to the researcher representing sharing. The outer circle is cultural safety. Participants were given the option of where and how they wanted to participate in the study. I was prepared to travel to them, facilitate a focus group or do the interview via Skype or phone. All participants chose to participate by phone. I utilised the 'merge call' function on my phone to have the cultural broker on the call simultaneously. This meant that the participants could participate in their own space without an outsider intruding in their private world. It also empowered them to finish the call whenever they wanted. In the same environment, having a strict list of questions would not have been culturally safe or respectful. I needed, as the researcher, to listen to what they had to say, not control the discussion. It also meant that the impact of my own physicality and cultural identity was less of a barrier than if we were physically together, with the risk of my whiteness dominating their perception of my agenda.

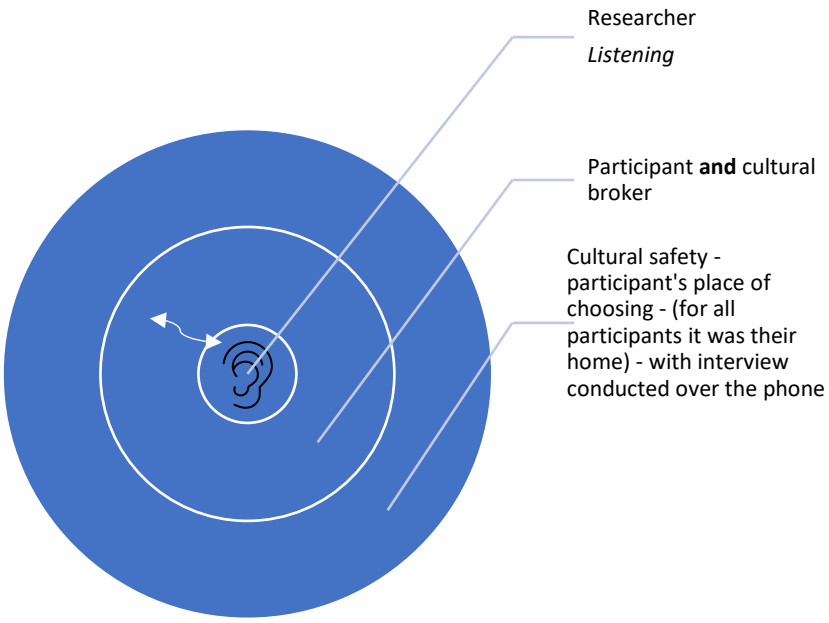

Figure 3.4

Methodology Employed for Qualitative Track Study One

3.4 Procedures for Conducting the Research

3.4.1 Procedures for Quantitative Track Study One: Audit of University Websites

3.4.1.1 Developing the Website Audit Tool

To provide structure and consistency to the examination of the 40 Australian university websites, I developed an instrument to identify, compare and contrast each university's approach to supporting Indigenous students and students with a disability and determining the availability of support available to Indigenous students with a disability. This instrument provided what Pauwels described as an inventory of salient features drawn from the literature identifying barriers faced by Indigenous students with a disability and reported in Chapter One of this thesis (Pauwels, 2012). The instrument (see Appendix E) comprises 12 questions with 32 data fields designed to capture data that identifies current practice in universities regarding supporting Indigenous students and students with a disability (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Example Data Field From the Website Audit Tool

1. Was there information on the disability services website regarding the availability of Indigenous staff for students to contact? Yes ☐ No ☐ General Comments:

Nineteen of the audit tool's data fields require yes/no responses; there were places for general comments in 11 areas and data fields for the number of clicks in two places. Data collected for each university website audit included the university's name, access date and URL.

Each question in the survey instrument was designed to collect data to:

- identify each university's approach to supporting students, thereby informing this research as to the nature and diversity of support provided in 2016
- provide a starting point for analysis and discussion regarding how the higher education sector can better respond to support the needs of Indigenous students with disabilities.

3.4.1.2 Using the University Audit Tool

Although it predominantly utilised content analysis, this study also incorporated user experience testing methods designed to identify the ease with which people access information on the internet (Krug, 2014). These user experience testing methods are typically used to capture and monitor the first-time experience of people accessing a particular website. For example, Florida International University undertook usability testing of its library website to test students' user experiences. The Florida study produced findings that were so useful that it led the university to commit to moving 'toward (an ongoing) process that combines user testing with content strategy' every five years (Dominguez et al., 2015, p. 119). For this study, rather than monitoring the user experience of multiple users of one website, I monitored my own

access experience of multiple sites. I noted success in finding information as a viewer of the website regarding:

- the disability support offered by each university and linkages from those disability support pages to Indigenous students support services
- Indigenous support services available at each university and how these either linked in with or promoted support available to students with a disability
- overall impression of the imagery of the websites regarding promoting a respectful and welcoming message to Indigenous students (e.g., use of photos of Indigenous students studying, the Aboriginal flag and use of particular colours)
- ability to locate clear information on the website about whom students should contact if they required assistance
- how deeply buried in the website architecture the information that I was looking for was located (measured by the number of clicks)
- what additional supports were available for Indigenous students
- Whether Indigenous students with a disability could present directly for help or if they were required to provide documentation from medical and allied health specialists to support their request for help.

3.4.1.3 Timing of the University Websites Audit

I examined the relevant websites during the period leading up to the 2016 Australian Federal Election. Data collection commenced on 10 May 2016 (the election was called on 8 May 2016) and finalised on 10 July 2016 (before the announcement of the new government). This timeframe was considered a stable period during which to overview sector-wide websites, as the Australian government was in caretaker mode. Caretaker Conventions in Australasia dictate that the 'bureaucracy should avoid implementing major policy decisions during the caretaker period' (Menzies & Tiernan, 2007, p. 34). I reasoned that this stability would be

reflected on university websites—it was an unlikely time for universities to change their public communications regarding their support services. I examined 40 Australian universities: 38 of these are publicly funded, and two are private institutions. The universities used for data collection are listed below:

- Australian Catholic University (ACU)
- Australian National University (ANU)
- Bond University (Bond)
- Central Queensland University (CQU)
- Charles Darwin University (CDU)
- Charles Sturt University (SCU)
- Curtin University (Curtin)
- Deakin University (Deakin)
- Edith Cowan University (ECU)
- Federation University (FEDUNI)
- Flinders University (Flinders)
- Griffith University (Griffith)
- James Cook University (JCU)
- Latrobe University (LaTrobe)
- Macquarie University (Macquarie)
- Monash University (Monash)
- Murdoch University (Murdoch)
- Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University (RMIT)
- Southern Cross University (SCU)
- Swinburne University of Technology (Swinburne)

- Torrens University (Torrens)
- University of Adelaide (Adelaide)
- University of Canberra (Canberra)
- University of Melbourne (Melbourne)
- University of New England (UNE)
- University of New South Wales (UNSW)
- University of Newcastle (Newcastle)
- University of Notre Dame (UNDA)
- University of Queensland (UQ)
- University of South Australia (UniSA)
- University of Southern Queensland (USQ)
- University of Sydney (Sydney)
- University of Tasmania (UTAS)
- University of Technology Sydney (UTS)
- University of Sunshine Coast (USC)
- University of Western Australia (UWA)
- University of Western Sydney (UWS)
- University of Wollongong (UOW)
- Victoria University (VU)

The audit, subsequent analysis and unexpected research outputs also helped to identify whether universities are approaching service and supports in a manner in line with the United Nations World Health Organization's (UN/WHO) twin-track approach. This approach 'integrates disability-sensitive measures into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes … (with the goal) to integrate and include persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and development' (UN, 2020). In the context of this

study, this refers to whether university websites reflect and scaffold inclusion for Indigenous students with a disability across all aspects of university life.

Using the audit tool, I looked to identify links to supports from each university website home page. Where there were no apparent links to supports, I used the website search facility. I limited search terms to ‘disability support’; ‘Indigenous’; ‘Aboriginal’; ‘student support’; ‘student help’ and ‘counselling’. Each university’s services and supports for these student cohorts were recorded and documented against the survey instrument (see Appendix E).

The time taken to audit each university website varied according to how much information was readily available. For example, if a university did not indicate support for Indigenous students, additional searching was conducted to see if there were policies or other documents attached as PDFs (and, thus, not accessible through the search facility on the website). After examining each university’s approach to supporting Indigenous students, students with a disability and Indigenous students with a disability, I collated the data in an Excel spreadsheet. There was a spreadsheet for each question, including comments where I noted additional information at the time of audit in preparation for analysis.

3.4.1.4 Procedures for Analysis of the Data From Quantitative Track Study One

From the data collated in the Excel sheets, I clustered together results from related questions in the website audit in the following topic areas:

- the organisation of both disability support and Indigenous student support across each campus
- additional supports for Indigenous students
- imagery used
- the difficulty of navigation to find information regarding support.

The findings and analysis from this study are reported in Chapter Four.

3.4.2 Procedures for Qualitative Track Study One: Listening to the Voices

3.4.2.1 Human Ethics Approval

Human ethics approval was secured from the University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee on 17 October 2016 for this research component. All procedures undertaken were compliant with the proposal (Approval No: 2016/751).

The following documents can be viewed in the Appendices:

- Human ethics approval (see Appendix A)
- Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix B)
- Participant Consent Form (see Appendix C)
- Terms of reference of Indigenous Advisory Group (see Appendix D)

3.4.2.2 Recruitment of Participants

In establishing a starting point for participants' snowballing recruitment, I distributed an invitation to participate via social media. This invitation included a link to a dedicated website setting out information about the research and linking to a full copy of the PIS, enabling potential participants to read about the study independently and anonymously before initiating contact with the researcher (Kerr, 2016). Screenshots of these postings and the dedicated website setting out the PIS are included in Figures 3.5–3.8.

Figure 3.5

Sample of Social Media Posting on Twitter for Recruitment of Participants

Figure 3.6

Sample of Posting on Facebook for Participant Recruitment

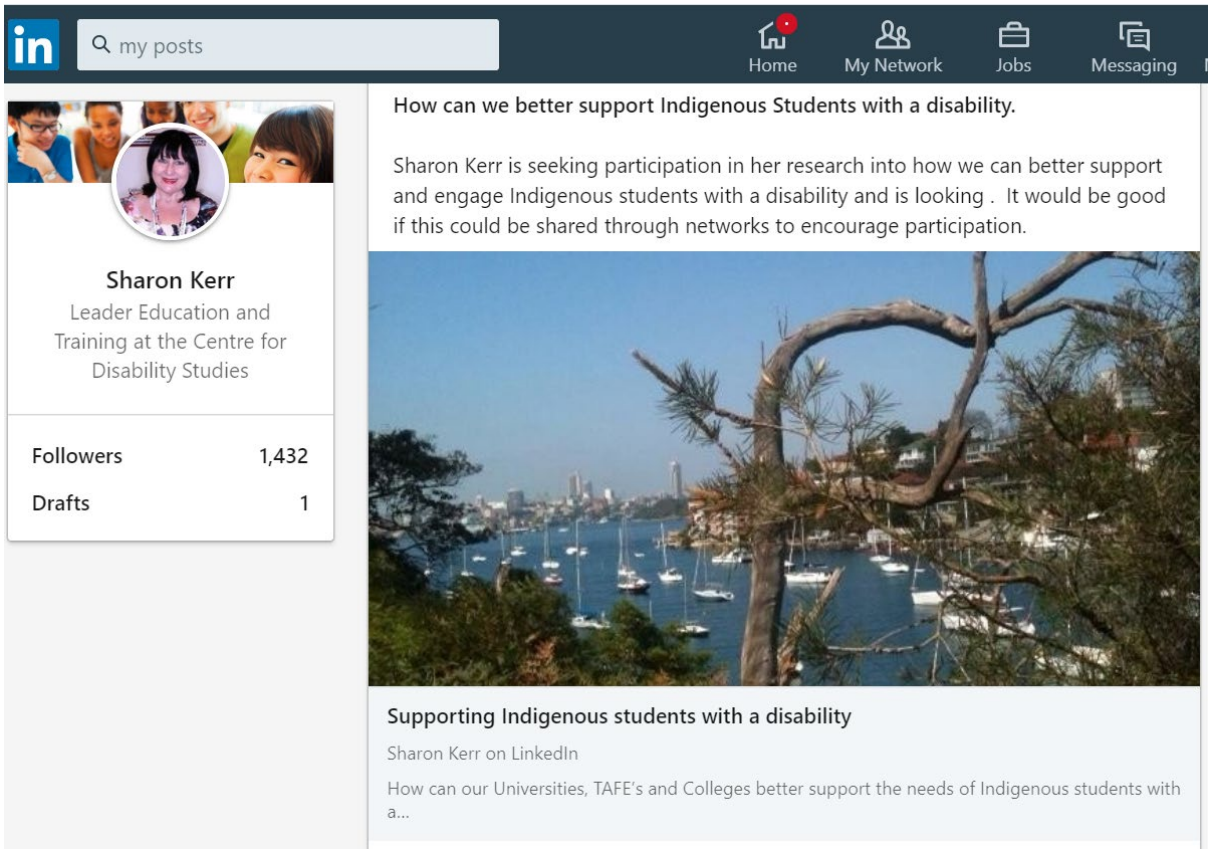

Figure 3.7

Sample of Posting on LinkedIn for Recruitment of Participants

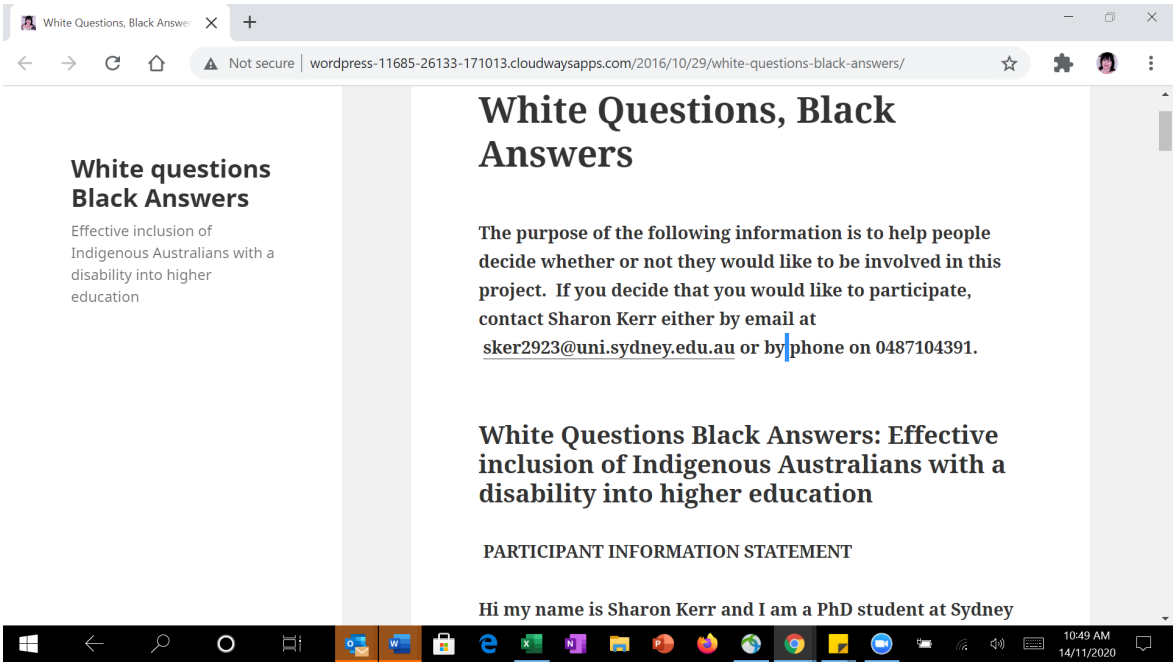

Figure 3.8

Screenshot of Dedicated Website With Participant Information Statement Linked to Each Posting

These social media posts achieved over 2,500 views and were shared multiple times throughout social media platforms. Additionally, the Indigenous Advisory Group members shared this information through their networks. From these combined efforts, the participants for this research were secured. In all, five[3] respondents who identified as having a disability, being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and having attempted higher education within Australia self-nominated for participation. All respondents met the target cohort criteria and were accepted into the study. Respondents lived in various states and territories while

[3] For this type of research, where case studies are being studied, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) have recommended that 'a small number is used, such as 4 to 10' (p. 174). Therefore, I considered that this was a sufficient sample size with which to commence the study, with the view of recruiting additional participants if insufficient data was able to be gained from the stories. To the contrary, each story was rich with learnings—therefore, no further recruitment was undertaken.

undertaking their studies; however, at the time of participation, they were residing in Sydney (one female), North Coast New South Wales (one male), South Coast New South Wales (one male), Canberra (one female) and Adelaide (previously Darwin; one female).

3.4.2.3 Gathering the Story Data: Procedures for Conducting and Transcribing Interviews

All participants provided informed consent before engaging in the interviews. Consent for participants with vision impairment and physical impairment of the upper limbs was secured in line with ethics approval through verbal consent following the PIS being read to them by the researcher before the interview commenced. All participants were provided copies of the consent form in the appropriate format for their individual disability prior to arranging the interview sessions. I emphasised the available option to withdraw from the process at any time. Three participants were either blind or had vision loss, and two had physical disabilities.

In line with the oral history methodology presented by Rodríguez and Villanueva (2015), a concerted effort was made to 'empower participants as the experiential experts to take control of the research technique' (p. 63). In total, five Indigenous Australians with a disability shared their stories and experiences. All five sessions were held over the phone, taking up to two hours each. A time limit was not set—each participant set the duration and content of their session. Each session was also attended by Roslyn Sackley, who was employed as a cultural broker and helped make participants feel relaxed and empowered during the research process. She would introduce herself and myself as the researcher, talk about her family and reflect back comments when participants mentioned their own families and communities. To avoid rushing participants, interviews commenced when Roslyn Sackley indicated that it was the right time to proceed.

Participants were invited to tell their personal stories of engagement with higher education. Two examples of the invitations to share are listed here:

perhaps if you could tell us your story and what your experience has been with higher education (Interview 2, Line 22)

Maybe if I just let you tell your story and then I'll come back with questions and fill in the gaps afterwards, how does that sound. You just tell us what you want to tell us ... where you were studying ... what you were doing ... you know and what challenges you found, how does that sound? (Interview 5 Line, 12–15)

After completing the interviews, I transcribed the recordings and de-identified and formatted them so that each line was numbered. Transcriptions were then returned to the participants to provide them with the opportunity of providing feedback and, if necessary, corrections were made. I made revisions to two transcripts in response to requests from the participants. I then deleted the recordings in line with ethics requirements.

3.4.2.4 Collation of Data and Analysis for Qualitative Track Study One

Although my first inclination was to present these stories in their entirety, this was not done due to a desire to preserve anonymity and avoid plausible or accidental disclosure, as explained by Wiles (2012):

> It may be necessary to omit some data, especially when data are particularly sensitive or when its inclusion could have negative consequences if the individual were identified … especially in cases where dramatic or extreme situations are described which are likely to make individuals identifiable. (p. 47)

As can be seen in full in Appendix G, themes were captured from the personal stories of the participants in the following four-phase process, in line with the method for thematic synthesis proposed by Thomas and Harden (2008):

1. I listed 53 quotes that provided me with critical learnings from listening to the participants' accounts. For this phase, I copied directly from the transcripts every

time new knowledge resonated or provoked thought, further reading or enquiry. I listed these as verbatim quotes.

2. I developed a researcher interpretation and wording for each of these quotes to represent the lesson I had learned.
3. I consolidated these 53 key quotes under 15 headings that I labelled as 'consolidated theme components'.
4. Finally, I grouped these 15 headings to form the following five overarching themes for analysis:

    Theme 1: Barriers experienced due to the institutions' variable and bureaucratic processes in providing needed assistance

    Theme 2: Barriers that were due to having a disability

    Theme 3: Barriers associated with Indigeneity

    Theme 4: Importance of positive relationships

    Theme 5: A spirit of resilience, determination and desire to succeed.

I then conducted the analysis under each theme. This analysis is presented in Chapter Five.

3.4.3 Procedures for Quantitative Track Study Two and Triangulation (Validation) of Findings

Quantitative Track Study Two was undertaken in December 2020, creating the third dataset for this study. Data was collected and analysed prior to converging the three studies' findings and analysis and the Indigenous Advisory Group's input. See Figure 3.9 for a flow chart of the processes involved in conducting this research using mixed methods convergent design, including triangulation of research findings.

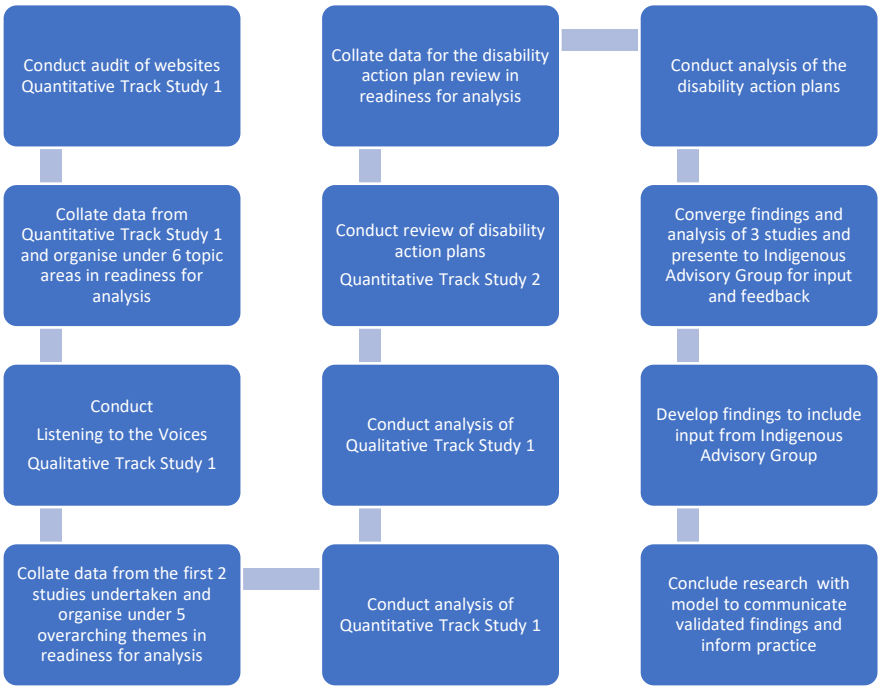

Figure 3.9

Research Process for Mixed Methods Convergent Parallel Design With Triangulation of Research Findings

I used this triangulation method to verify the inferences and findings from different information and data sources from the two Tracks. The data and findings from the final verification meeting with the Indigenous Advisory Group also contributed to verification of the findings. As explained in Section 3.3.1, this triangulation method is used as a method to verify and facilitate 'the comparison of information obtained from the application of different techniques … and triangulation of information sources, whose value consists of verifying the inferences extracted from an information source by means of another information source' (López López, 2015, p. 180). As mentioned in Section 3.3.1.3, I was the only researcher to

extract and interpret the information about the services from the websites. This triangulation method of examining the DAPs and the subsequent results has provided me with greater confidence in the findings; as Oleinik (2017) stated, 'triangulation in content analysis increases the validity and reliability of the outcomes' (p. 176).

Following the completion of data collection and analysis of findings from both Tracks, in line with the methodology of mixed methods convergent parallel design, the studies' findings were brought together, as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). Observations from the websites were arranged in topic areas under observations made from the audit of the 40 universities, learnings from the five personal stories in Qualitative Track Study One were arranged under the identified themes, and the review of the DAPs was arranged under the four questions used to examine the plans. Once these threads were drawn together and commonalities and relationships identified, I arrived at conclusions concerning gaps in the current student support for Indigenous students with a disability. Next, the findings and conclusions were discussed with the Indigenous Advisory Group to obtain their feedback and input at a final validation meeting, chaired by Roslyn Sackley as the lead of the Advisory Group. This meeting was recorded, and the Advisory Group's final input was used to develop the findings and modify the proposed model for the higher education sector to support Indigenous students with a disability. After aligning the research questions, which evolved from the literature review, with the validated findings and analysis, the *Framework for All* was developed.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the mixed methods convergent parallel design, including triangulation of data, the method adopted for this research. Three studies and a final validation meeting with the Indigenous Advisory Group provided insights into the experience of Indigenous students with a disability engaging with the Australian higher education sector.

These insights were validated before the conclusion of the research through a triangulation process of all data. The approach taken as a non-Indigenous researcher was designed to ensure cultural safety and empowerment for all participants who have contributed their Indigenous standpoint to this research. Key to this methodology has been my desire to ensure that participants have not felt coerced into sharing their stories, knowledge and wisdom and, at all times, have felt respected, listened to and revered as the lived experience specialists that they are. This methodology was scaffolded by the conceptual framework presented in Figure 3.1, conducted using the research methodology for each study and the systematic procedures for undertaking the research, and analysed using the theoretical context presented in Chapter Two. I have highlighted limitations to the research methodology and my embedded response to these identified limitations. My goal was to increase each study's rigour and ensure the data's validity, resulting in the production of outputs that have utility throughout the higher education sector for the benefit of Indigenous students with a disability.

Chapter Four presents the data and findings from Quantitative Track Study One: Audit of Australian University Websites and Study Two: Review of the DAPs; Chapter Five presents the data and findings from Qualitative Track Study One: Listening to the Voices; and Chapter Six presents the data and findings from the converged analysis of the data from all studies and the outcomes of the final validation meeting with the Indigenous Advisory Group. The *Framework for All* follows this, in addition to all recommendations arising from the research.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis of Quantitative Track Studies One and Two

This chapter provides the findings and analysis from Quantitative Track Study One: Audit of Australian University Websites and Study Two: Review of DAPs, according to the methods provided in Chapter Three. For each component of the research the findings have been provided, including factors that influenced observations and collection of data. This is then followed by the analysis of the data collected through each section of the two tools developed for the audit of the websites and the review of the DAPs. Chapter Four concludes with a summary of the findings from both studies that make up the quantitative track of this research.

4.1 Findings and Analysis from Quantitative Track Study One: Audit of Australian University Websites

The Study One data were gathered using the audit tool developed for this study (see Appendix E). Following data gathering, the data was statistically descriptively analysed for each audit question and presented under the following four topic areas:

1. the organisation of both disability support and Indigenous student support across each campus
2. additional supports for Indigenous students
3. imagery used

- the difficulty of navigation to find information about support.

4.1.1 The Organisation of Both Disability Support and Indigenous Student Support Across Each Campus

This topic presents the results and analysis for questions 1–5 and 7:

Q.1 Was there information about disability support services?

All 40 universities (100 per cent) provided information about disability support services on their websites.

Q.2 Did the disability support services page indicate support services available to Indigenous students?

Thirty-five (87.5 %) of the disability support services webpages did not indicate support services available to Indigenous students. Of the five (12.5%) universities that did indicate support services available to Indigenous students on their websites, three (7.5%) achieved this through the design element of a link to all student services, including Indigenous student support services on the sidebar. One (2.5%) university included acknowledgement of country on every page of the website, which also hyperlinked through to the Indigenous student support page.

Q.3 Was there information on the disability services website regarding the availability of Indigenous staff for students to contact?

No (0%) universities had information on their disability services website regarding the availability of Indigenous staff for students to contact.

Q.4 Was there information about Indigenous support services?

Thirty-eight (95%) universities had information about Indigenous support services. Two (5%) universities did not have such information; both of these were private universities.

Q.5 Did the Indigenous support services indicate support available for students with a disability?

Thirty-three (82.5%) universities did not indicate support available for students with a disability on their Indigenous support services page. Of the seven (17.5%) that did indicate support available for students with a disability, three (7.5%) provided this information through the design element of a link to all student services on the website sidebar. One (2.5%) university

provided this information through the response to a question on the Frequently Asked Questions page.

Data from questions 1–5 revealed a siloed service delivery model, with the Indigenous support units and disability support units operating in separate areas of the universities. Indigenous students with a disability entering a university and seeking support are faced with deciding whether to seek assistance from the Indigenous support unit or the disability support unit or both.

For a student who chooses the disability support unit as their pathway for support, the results suggest that they would not be provided with disability support from an Indigenous staff member—none (0%) of the 40 universities indicated this service. Further, as only five (12.5%) of the 40 universities provided a link from the disability support to Indigenous support, in 35 (87.5%) of universities, they would be at risk of not being linked up with any of the services available to Indigenous students.

For a student who chooses the Indigenous support unit as their avenue for support, the outcome was similar. Only seven (17.5%) Indigenous support units indicated support available for students with a disability on their Indigenous support services page. An Indigenous student with an unidentified or unrecognised disability, who directly accesses Indigenous student support services in 39 (81.5%) of the 40 universities that did offer Indigenous services, would be accessing a service that is not linked with mainstream disability services. This support pathway increases the risk that the student would be accessing support through a support unit whose staff may not be disability aware or able to suggest additional supports. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the findings from questions 1–5.

Table 4.1

Organisation of Disability Student Support and Indigenous Student Support on Australian University Websites

Information	Number of universities (N = 40)	Percentage of universities (%)
Information about disability support	40	100.0
Information about Indigenous student support	38	95.0
Indigenous support pages indicating support for students with a disability	7	17.5
Disability support pages indicating support for Indigenous students	5	12.5
Contacts with Indigenous support staff promoted on disability support pages	0	0.0

Q.7 Could Indigenous students with a disability present directly for help or were they required to obtain documentation from others prior to receiving assistance (e.g., required to obtain a form filled by a doctor verifying their need)?

Only seven (17.5%) universities provided the opportunity for Indigenous students with a disability to present directly for help without supporting documentation. Thirty-three (82.5%) universities required students to provide documentation from a specialist medical or allied health practitioner before the support process could commence. One (2.5%) university described a 10-step process for all students to proceed through to receive a Learning Action Plan (LAP), noting that, once it lapsed, a new LAP would need to be secured before further assistance was given. One university also noted the need for students to have documentary evidence of their Aboriginality.

4.1.2 Additional Supports for Indigenous Students

Questions 6 and 10 are presented under this topic. Question 6 investigated the additional supports available for Indigenous students, and question 10 identified whether the institutions had provided clear information and contact details for Indigenous students.

Q.6 Was there information about any of the following additional supports (see Table 4.3) available for Indigenous students? (Note: this is support specifically for Indigenous students that is additional to that offered to the general student cohort.)

Analysis of the audit findings revealed marked variability across universities regarding the types of supports and services provided to Indigenous students generally and, by implication, to Indigenous students with a disability who present to the Indigenous student support unit. These supports were those either offered by or linked from the Indigenous student support units. There appeared to be some standard offerings such as supportive spaces for Indigenous students (34; 85%), tutoring (35; 87.5%), academic and administrative support (35; 87.5%), funded by Commonwealth Government programs such as the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS; Department of Education and Training, n.d.). Notably, some universities had introduced innovative and responsive programs administered through their Indigenous support units, including:

- relationship managers (1; 2.5%)
- childcare provided by Indigenous childcare workers (1; 2.5%)
- initiatives to support employment while studying (1; 2.5%)
- Indigenous support officers for every faculty (1; 2.5%).

Little by way of technical support was offered to Indigenous students, with only one (2.5%) university providing computers for personal use and none (0%) offering ATs such as text-to-speech or speech-to-text. ATs assist students who have difficulty engaging with written text. These technologies empower students to take lecture notes using smartpens, listen

to readings using text-to-speech technologies, dictate their writing using speech-to-text and use advanced spelling, glossary and grammar programs to scaffold their learning and engagement (see e.g., Kerr & Baker, 2013; Istenic Starcic & Kerr, 2014; Kerr et al., 2014).

The audit revealed that, although 14 (35%) universities provided counselling and support to their Indigenous students, none (0%) provided Indigenous students with the choice of support from either a female or male counsellor. Table 4.2 summarises the above findings from question 6.

Table 4.2

Additional Supports Available for Indigenous Students

Type of additional support available for Indigenous students	Number of universities (N = 40)	Percentage of universities (%)
Academic and administrative support	35	87.5
Tutoring	35	87.5
Supportive spaces for Indigenous students	34	85.0
Assistance with finances	34	85.0
Alternative entry pathways	28	70.0
Remedial and preparatory courses	24	60.0
Mentoring programs	21	52.5
Internships and work experience programs	17	42.5
Counselling and support	14	35.0
Assistance with housing	11	27.5
Employment while studying	7	17.5
Block release programs	1	2.5
Away from base program	1	2.5
Computers for personal use	1	2.5
Relationship manager	1	2.5
Indigenous support officer with every faculty	1	2.5
Orientation program	1	2.5
Male and female counsellors available	0	0.0
Assistive technologies	0	0.0

Q.10 Was there clear information on the website as to who Indigenous students should contact if they required assistance?

Thirty-five (87.5%) universities provided clear contact details for Indigenous students, either a department phone number or email address of whom they should contact if they needed assistance. Of these 35, only one (2.5%) provided full names, roles and contact details of the Indigenous staff to contact.

4.1.3 Imagery Used

Both questions 8 and 9 relate to the imagery used on websites and the messages they conveyed to the researcher. Therefore, these two questions are presented together under this topic.

Q.8 Did the university website's design, imagery and content reflect a welcoming message to Indigenous students (e.g., use of photos of Indigenous students studying, Aboriginal flag, use of particular colours)?

In their study of two global university ranking websites, Estera and Shahjahan (2018) concluded that 'visual imagery normalises whiteness as a "universal color" [*sic*] and renders the racially minoritised student as "fixed" and/or non-existent' (p. 941). With a similar approach, this study examined imagery used on university websites to gain data concerning messages conveyed to potential students about the institution's cultural makeup.

Thirty-four (85%) university websites had imagery and content that reflected a welcoming message to Indigenous students. Of these 34 (85%), 27 (79%) limited this imagery to pages on the website explicitly addressing Indigenous students or an acknowledgement of country. Only one (2.5%) had a picture of an Aboriginal teacher on the front page of the website (which is geared towards assisting the general student cohort).

Both private universities had no Indigenous imagery or acknowledgement of country. Table 4.3 provides a summary of the findings from question 8.

Table 4.3

Imagery Used on Websites to Welcome Indigenous Students

Imagery	Number of universities (N = 40)	Percentage of universities (%)
Imagery and content reflecting a welcoming message to Indigenous students	35	85.0
Imagery limited to pages on the website specifically addressing Indigenous students or an acknowledgement of country	27	79.0
Imagery of Indigenous staff on the front page of the website	1	2.5
Private universities with Indigenous imagery or acknowledgement of country	0	0.0

Q.9 Did the university website's design, imagery and content reflect a welcoming message to other cohorts of students (e.g., refugees, international)?

Twenty-one (52.5%) universities appeared to be using generic stock images and were not obviously targeting any specific cohort of students. Of the 19 (47.5%) universities that appeared to be targeting student cohorts through their imagery, seven (36.8%) appeared to be targeting international students, nine (47.4%) had imagery supporting an inclusive multicultural student cohort, and three (15.8%) appeared to be focusing on white Australians (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Imagery to Welcome Other Cohorts

Imagery	Number of universities (N = 40)	Percentage of universities (%)
Stock images used with no specific target	21	52.5
Imagery on website supporting an inclusive multicultural student cohort	19	47.0
Imagery focusing on international students	7	37.0
Imagery focusing on white Australians	3	16.0

4.1.4 The Difficulty of Navigation to Find Information About Support

Questions 11 and 12 are presented under this topic. When examining a website for usability and access to information, the number of 'clicks' that a user must make until they locate the information they require indicates how buried the information is. With each click that viewers must make, there is an increased risk of students not finding the required information. Jiménez Iglesias et al. (2018) have established that the longer it takes to browse a website, the more difficult the experience is for the users. For Indigenous students with a disability, a problematic pathway to information regarding the availability of support may create further barriers.

Q. 11 From the front page of the website, how many clicks did it take to get to information about support for Indigenous students? (Note: this question included 'number of clicks' and 'general comments'.)

Of the 38 (95%) universities that did have information about support for Indigenous students, the number of 'clicks' from the front page to arrival at the information for Indigenous students varied between one and five clicks between universities; 22 (57.8%) of the universities required three or more clicks to locate the information, and 16 (42%) required only one or

two clicks. Three (8%) universities had no visible pathway from the home page; therefore, the search engine was required to find the desired information (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Website Navigation Experience to Find Information for Indigenous Students Identified by the Number of Clicks

Pathway to finding information for Indigenous students	Number of universities (N = 38*)	Percentage of universities (%)
3 or more clicks to find information on Indigenous support*(indicating information being difficult to find*)	22	58
1 or 2 clicks to find information on Indigenous support *(indicating information being easy to find)*	16	42
Search engine required to find the page *(indicating no logical visible pathway from home page)*	3	8

* Two (5%) universities had no information for Indigenous students and have not been included in this table.

Q. 12 From the front page of the website, how many clicks did it take to get to information about support for students with a disability?

The number of clicks to find information on disability support ranged between one and six clicks for different universities, with 35 (87.5%) requiring three or more clicks to locate the relevant pages and 5 (12.5%) requiring only one or two clicks. Three (7.5%) universities had no visible pathway from the home page, requiring the search engine to find the desired information. Two (5.0%) of these were the same universities that required using the search engine to find information about Indigenous student support services (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Website Navigation Experience to Find Information for Disability Support Identified by Number of Clicks

Pathway to finding information for disability support	Number of universities (N = 40)	Percentage of universities (%)
3 or more clicks to find information on disability support *(indicating information being difficult to find)*	35	87.5
1 or 2 clicks to find information on disability support *(indicating information being easy to find)*	5	12.5
Search engine required to find the page *(indicating no logical visible pathway from home page)*	3	7.5

4.2 Findings of Quantitative Track Study Two: Review of Australian University Disability Action Plans

This review revealed that, since 2009, only 30 (75%) of the 40 universities had developed DAPs and made them public; only five (12%) of these mentioned the needs of Indigenous students with a disability, leaving 25 (63%) DAPs that were not inclusive of considerations for Indigenous students with a disability (see Figure 4.1).

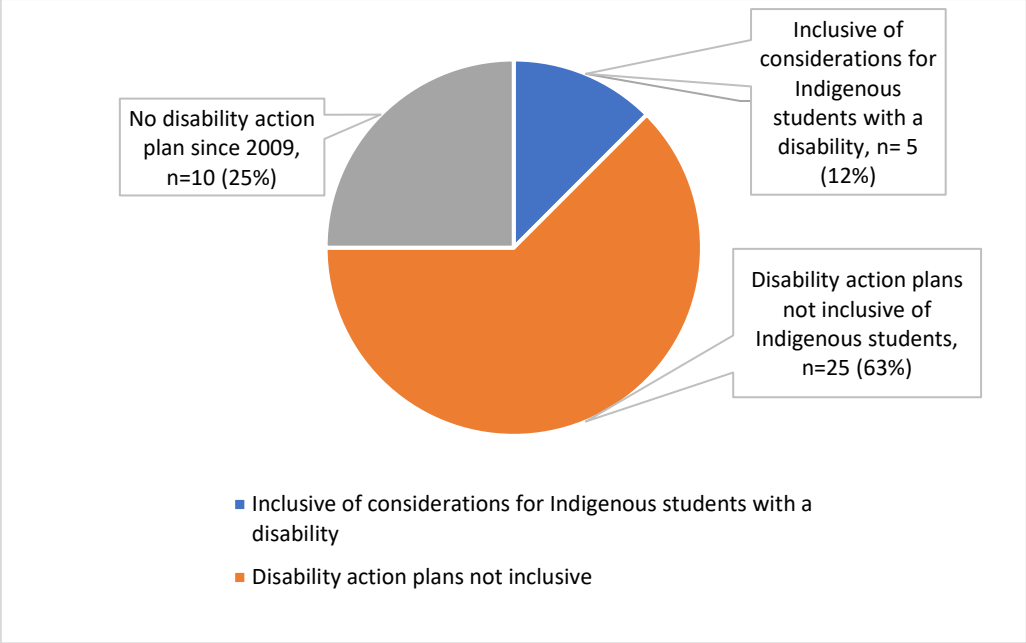

Figure 4.1

Australian Universities That Have Developed Disability Action Plans Since 2009

Fourteen (46.7%) of the 30 plans had lapsed at the time of this review, and two of these were universities that had no mention of Indigenous students. This left only 16 (40%) Australian universities with DAPs that were current in 2020 and three (7.5%) universities with DAPs that were demonstrably inclusive of Indigenous students with a disability (see Figure 4.2).

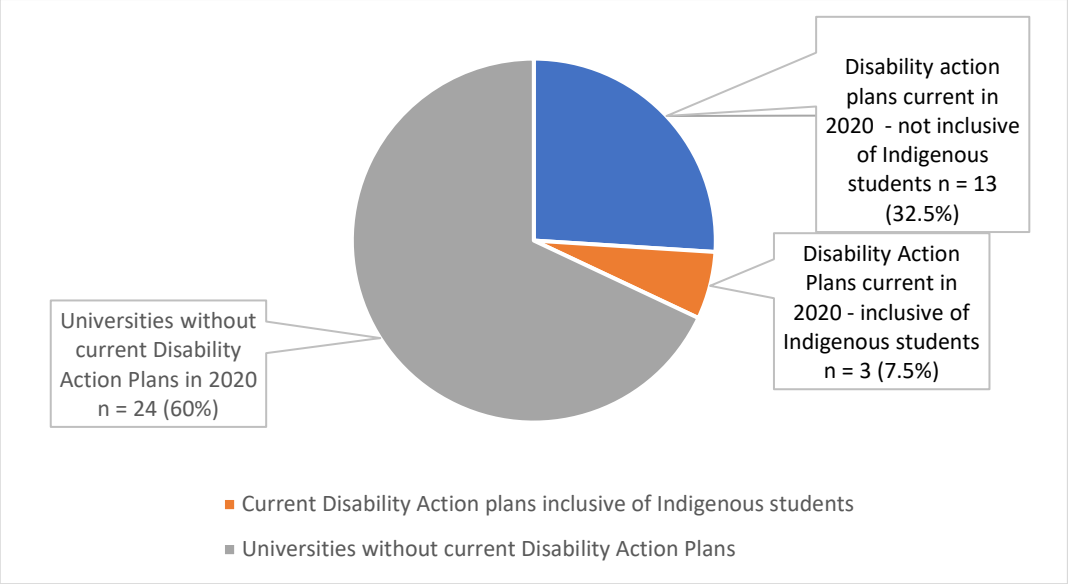

Figure 4.2

Universities with Disability Action Plans That Were Current in 2020

Of the 30 (75%) universities that had DAPs, 16 (53%) were in place and current at the time of the 2016 website audit (Study One).

4.3 Summary of Findings from Quantitative Track Studies One and Two

This chapter has presented the initial findings and analysis from Quantitative Track Study One: Audit of University Websites and Study Two: Review of DAPS.

4.3.1 Summary of Findings from Study One: Audit of University Websites

The audit revealed potential barriers to Indigenous students with a disability locating and receiving the optimum support available to them when studying at an Australian university. The data gathered from questions 1–5 of the survey reflected a siloed service delivery model, with the Indigenous support units and disability support units operating in separate areas of the universities. Indigenous students with a disability entering a university are faced with deciding whether to seek support from the Indigenous support unit or the disability support unit. Only five (12.5%) of the 40 universities indicated a link from the disability support information to Indigenous support, and only seven (17.5%) Indigenous support units indicated support available for students with a disability. This siloed approach to providing disability support is

not in line with the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy twin-track approach that promotes both an integrated and personalised approach to support and services (UN, 2020).

While 35 (85%) of universities administered national initiatives such as ITAS with a formulaic approach to service delivery (e.g., limitation of two hours of tuition per subject) (Department of Education and Training, n.d.), variations between universities' approaches to support services were evident. The degree of variance indicates that internal university policies and procedures determine the direction taken by support services; therefore, the opportunity exists for universities to elect to be flexible and responsive to the needs of Indigenous students with a disability. Notably, some universities had introduced innovative and responsive programs administered through their Indigenous support units, including:

- relationship managers (1; 2.5%)
- childcare provided by Indigenous childcare workers (1; 2.5%)
- initiatives to support employment while studying (1; 2.5%)
- Indigenous support officers with every faculty (1; 2.5%).

However, the two (5%) private universities included in the study had no mention of supports for Indigenous students and little indication of support for students with a disability.

Thirty-five (85%) universities did not link to Indigenous student support services from their disability support services. Further, there was no (0%) evidence on any of the websites of flexibility within the university structures to support Indigenous students with a disability who were affected by their carer, economic or health challenges or provision of employment while studying. Generally, transition programs from higher education to employment for Indigenous students were not evident. Further, while disability support was available, 33 (82.5%) of the universities required students to provide documentation from a specialist medical or allied health practitioner before the support process could commence. According to the literature discussed in the first three chapters of this thesis and the interview data reported in the next

chapter, this is potentially problematic for Indigenous students with either undiagnosed, unsupported or unreported disabilities.

Analysis of imagery on the publicly funded universities revealed that 35 (85%) of the universities were generally embracing respect for Indigenous students and communities. Of the 27 (79%) that included Indigenous imagery, this was limited to pages relating to Indigenous students, suggesting a non-inclusive approach to the place of Indigenous people on campus. Only one (2.5%) university had imagery of an Indigenous staff member on the front page for the general student body. Information regarding support for Indigenous students and information on disability support were assessed as difficult to locate (based on page click numbers for 58% and 87.5 of universities, respectively).

For an Indigenous student with a disability who is unaware of the entire breadth of services available to them and is accessing services as they are presented on the university website, the risk exists that they could:

- access Indigenous support services only
- access disability support services only
- identify neither as having a disability nor being Indigenous and attempt to navigate barriers alone.

For students who only seek support through Indigenous support services, the evidence suggests that they would risk missing out on a wide range of disability support offered by institutions. Conversely, if they seek assistance only through the disability support services, Indigenous students with a disability may face the following challenges:

1. The disability support office is not likely to be linked with institutional Indigenous support services (87.5% of universities), and staff may be unaware of programs of support available to Indigenous students, leaving the students at a disadvantage.

2. On presenting to the disability support office, bureaucratic institutional processes and requirements require students to provide evidence of their disability and justification for assistance. Provision of support and services to students who present for assistance is overwhelming reliant on students having an official diagnosis of their disability, supporting documentation and a willingness to engage in the process of having their support needs triaged.
3. Where students fail to present this necessary and ongoing documentation, they risk being triaged out of the support cycle for their studies and placed at a disadvantage compared to the general student population.

Finally, students who do not access either disability or Indigenous support services risk undertaking their studies without any available support, placing them again at a disadvantage. Students may not present for support because they do not wish to disclose their disability or Indigeneity, for either cultural or personal reasons, or because they are unaware of the value of supports that have been put in place to assist students.

This website audit was intentionally conducted before undertaking Qualitative Track Study One: Listening to the Voices, presented in the following chapter.

4.3.2 Summary of Findings from Study One: Review of Disability Action Plans

The DAPs review demonstrates that, in 2020, 24 (60%) universities were not actively seeking to meet their obligations under the DDA, and 37 (92.5%) universities were not seeking to support Indigenous students with a disability specifically. This lack of inclusion in the strategic planning through the official DAP, registered with the AHRC, constitutes a significant omission in current planning schedules.

Chapter 5: Results of Qualitative Track Study One: Listening to the Voices

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the stories of five Indigenous people with a disability who have lived experience of engaging with the Australian higher education sector. I sought to listen to each individual's account and reflect on the learnings from each person's story. As a non-Aboriginal researcher, I was careful to preserve the Indigenous standpoint contributed by the participants to this research and faithfully communicate the lessons learned. The findings from these stories have been organised under five themes that reflect a high level of intersectionality. The methodology used for the collection and analysis of these data was presented in Chapter Three. Appendix G provides the mapping of the themes.

5.2 Theme 1: Barriers Experienced Due to Institutions' Variable and Bureaucratic Processes Surrounding the Provision of Assistance

This theme is presented under two sub-themes: variable service delivery and the importance of accessible learning materials. The first focuses on the barriers created by institutional practices regarding support; the second on the essential nature of accessible learning materials for students with sensory and learning disabilities to engage with their courses.

5.2.1 Variable Service Delivery

Participants indicated that the service and support they received were variable from institution to institution and within institutions, depending on whom they were interfacing with: 'it just depended on who you know and who would be really helpful in providing support' (P1). In the absence of receiving support from her university, this participant also said that she began

receiving it through the Indigenous support unit of another institution that was made aware of her predicament. She indicated that, from that point, staff 'would step in and support me with doing some research or helping me out' (P1).

All five participants indicated a lack of clarity regarding where to go for help. Although all five were undertaking studies with Indigenous academics, they were not in any contact with the disability support unit or aware of available supports. Only two participants actively sought support from disability support units. Generally, the participants would look to their lecturers and friends for help rather than going through the formalities of applying for assistance through the disability support unit. It was evident that some participants, despite acknowledging their own disabilities, did not think that the disability unit would be for them. Instead, they relied on friends or fellow students to help them: 'I would sometimes get them to carry my bag for me' (P5). If they needed accessible learning materials, they would ask their teaching staff for added assistance, accepting whatever help was able to be given to them. One student expressed the hit-and-miss status of support relating to accessible documents: 'sometimes it does happen, but they get it to me when they can get it done ... sometimes they couldn't do it, and I understood, but I used my magnifying glass, and that helped me through' (P3).

Overall, participants did not view the Indigenous support units within their respective universities as places from which to secure assistance, but rather as 'more just to get Indigenous people into the courses, rather than to be supporting them throughout the course' (P5). They also expressed disappointment with the Indigenous staff, who applied restrictive policies and procedures that were counterintuitive to meeting their needs, often denying the types of specific assistance requested. Such non-responsiveness is summed up well by the following comment: 'it was Indigenous academics convening this course … but there was no consideration for disability … for my circumstances' (P2).

Support was variable, and the degree of support often depended on individual lecturers' willingness to offer support or allow participants to use ATs: 'there were courses that I didn't end up doing because the lecturers didn't let me make (audio) recordings' (P2). Such situations worked against the interests of the participants.

Participants who did approach disability support units for assistance reported that the variable levels of support they received depended on whom they saw. They often did not receive their adapted learning materials in a timely fashion. If they complained, they would be told '[that they had come] into the university course knowing that it would take that time to [get materials converted] … they were told [that students were] aware of the situation, [and] it wasn't their fault' (P1). Participants expressed feeling powerless and unable to complain about the quality of the services. Further, they were left to wear the consequences of academic failure alone, as illustrated by the following comment:

> *Because I was trying to explain to them you know that it shouldn't have taken months for the [charity named] to prepare my course materials … but I had no standing and so I had to pay the HECS debt and that was that … I think I only paid off my HECS debt last year. (P1)*[4]

The consequences of failure were not only financial but also emotional. In facing the institutional consequences of failure, one participant felt abandoned on receiving 'a letter from the uni saying that because of minimum progress you are excluded for two years' (P2).

[4] HECS (now known as the Higher Education Loan Program) is a loan by the Commonwealth Government extended to students undertaking higher education. It is administered through the Australian Taxation Office and recipients are required to begin repaying the loan as soon as their income reaches a certain threshold. Through being retrenched and receiving a separation package, this particular participant was pushed into a higher tax bracket with increased obligations for repayment.

5.2.2 Accessibility of Learning Materials

For participants with sensory or learning disabilities, accessibility of learning materials and the availability of alternative formats was a key factor, as reflected in the following statement: 'anyone that's got a vision impairment like [me], require large print to read articles, and um, and yeah I need large print' (P3). Some participants had been studying over several decades and reported more positive support earlier in their studies, particularly outside university settings:

> *I knew I had the ability and I had quite a bit of support at TAFE [in the 1980s] … I had some of the textbooks and papers put onto cassette at that time, and I had things put into Braille … they paid for things to be put into Braille for me … and I could just type things up and put it onto a disk and give it to the teacher … everything was really great. (P1)*

However, when the same participant attempted to enrol in an online course in 2015, she was told that it was not accessible, and no attempt was made to make it accessible. She commented that:

> *It just depends where you go. Some are not supportive and they are not accessible, [and they] tell you outright that they are not accessible, so sometimes it is difficult if you want to study something that is not accessible online and you think well what's the point. (P1)*

In addition to the accessibility of the content and lessons, another issue associated with online course delivery was the complexities regarding accessibility of the learning management system and difficulty in 'uploading [materials] or doing exams online' (P1).

Participants identified lack of funding as one reason for the non-provision of accessible learning materials. Staff were reported as making it clear what students could expect, saying, 'we only have the funding to help you in class, we can't come and help you with research' (P1).

Different levels of funding available within different states were also noted: ‘in NSW there was quite a bit of money to support you, but in Victoria it was different’ (P1).

Regardless of the reason for materials not being provided, participants could not engage with learning unless such resources were provided. For example, one participant who was blind (described above) required materials in Braille; these were provided by a third-party charity but not delivered until months into the course, which led ultimately to her not meeting deadlines and failing the course. Subsequently, she incurred a HECS debt for a course that she could not engage with because the material was not accessible. She reported:

> *I actually had to leave uni and just let it go because I couldn’t cope with how hard it was getting my course material given to me at the end of semester which created a lot of problems. I was up right throughout the night studying and I ended up getting burnt out because I couldn’t cope with it. (P1)*

Others also shared their experience of receiving Braille ‘ages after [they] needed it’ (P2), reflecting a similar impact on their lives and engagement with their study.

Participants also spoke of positive experiences in 2012–2013, when alternative formats were being centrally produced for the higher education sector nationally by a service that has since been disbanded. Students would provide a reading list of their requirements and request the required format, and materials would be converted and delivered either directly to the student or their university for distribution. As one student commented:

> *I was getting those in plenty of time ... before time in many cases ... which was a real luxury with what I had to contend with previously ... so that was a real dream really... um ... basically my greatest support was from [service named]. (P2)*

This service operated for 10 years between 2004 and 2014; however, due to changes in the host university’s strategic direction, it was dismantled, with a national focus shifting to UDL materials to mitigate the need for materials to be converted (Kerr & Baker, 2013).

For participants who had poor foundational education or were studying courses that were culturally removed from their own life experience, the issue of accessibility also included the ‘jargons and words [used in the delivery of courses]’ (P3). In such cases, additional support was also required. These stories provide insight into the human impact of UDL materials not being adopted in the course development and delivery phase by higher education providers.

5.3 Theme 2: Barriers That Were Due to Having a Disability

The barriers identified for this theme are presented under two sub-themes: Indigenous perspective on disability and ableist attitudes, and lack of flexibility of teaching staff.

5.3.1 Indigenous Perspective on Disability and Ableist Attitudes

The stories of the participants revealed that the Indigenous perspective on disability has a double impact:

- on how Indigenous staff interact with Indigenous participants who have a disability
- on how students perceive, recognise and declare their disability.

If students experienced staff expressing ideas such as ‘aren’t your disabilities a bit much for you being able to teach anyway?’ (P5), this led to disappointment, depicted in the following comment that Indigenous course coordinators were ‘planting seeds of failure in [the student’s] mind’ (P5).

Participants shared experiences of Indigenous staff lacking an understanding of their disability access needs and disability more generally. This response was unexpected because they assumed that Indigenous lecturing staff would have encountered disability within their own Indigenous communities, ‘because it’s all around you in the community … in their communities as well’ (P2). This gap was also considered attitudinal: ‘it was Indigenous academics convening this course, and I was so disappointed with their attitude. And some of those courses I attempted three times! ... but there was no consideration for disability’ (P2).

A further issue associated with attitudes was the lack of flexibility provided for students dealing with acute health impairments. Lack of understanding of disability compounded when Indigenous staff did not allow any flexibility for students to meet course requirements. The incident reported below by a single parent living in country New South Wales and studying in block mode in Sydney illustrates this well:

> *I was in the second year of it, I had further problems, I had to walk to the museum from the train station and you know the other people that I was with, they didn't seem to have a problem with it, but, my first problem was that, only a few days before I had spent about 5 days in hospital with pneumonia … my initial problem was you know, I was out of breath, keeping up with them, and then afterwards, my knees swollen up and then by the time I managed to get into my car with the crutches and drive back up to home from Sydney and drove straight to the hospital where they stuck a big needle in my knee and drained about 150 mlof fluid and as well gave me some other pain killers and Endone and the like and you know … but then I found that the Aboriginal support unit was saying that … well they had changed their policy about umm paying the travel allowance, for those who had actually driven themselves down. Like if you were more than 10 hours away then they would fly you to Sydney and pay the taxi fare from the airport to where we were staying at … umm but yeah … so then I went to my local member here and got in touch with the Federal Health Minister's Office and it wasn't until they twice … not once … but twice … instructed them to pay me the travel allowance that they actually did it … So I was getting disability discrimination from the Aboriginal support unit. … but um … you know I wasn't understanding why I was facing this problem with the Aboriginal support unit. (P5)*

In terms of why three of the participants did not seek support from the disability support services, it was clear that their attitudes towards disability created a barrier to seeking

assistance. One participant, a single mother with five children who was studying, working and supporting her family while having a disability, did not reach out to disability support services for assistance. She said:

> *I concentrated more on my studies I think than my disability, but I know other students needed more help than what I would have needed … I'm a very strong person. I know I've got a paralysed arm, but I sort of (take) life as it comes. (P4)*

Others shared this stoic and ableist attitude towards their disability: not wishing to be defined by their disability, thinking that others either deserved assistance more than them or that disability support was not really for people like them, that they were not 'really disabled' and that, the more visible your disability was, the more likely assistance would be forthcoming. One participant expressed that 'there were a few students who were in wheelchairs … maybe those were the ones that were given more priority' (P4).

5.3.2 Lack of Flexibility of Staff

The impact of flexibility or lack thereof on individual students proved to be a common thread through all themes. Participants reported both positive and negative experiences associated with staff flexibility concerning their access and personal needs. On the positive side, one participant indicated that she was 'fortunate with the course at the [named] university because they were quite flexible' (P1). However, in contrasting it with another tertiary institution, she reported attempting 'one subject where the lecturer was not flexible and actually complained that [she] was behind in submitting [her] assignment and he reported [her] to the Aboriginal unit for being behind in her studies' (P1). Although she had indicated that her assignment would be late, she felt there was no acknowledgement of her vision impairment and personal circumstances. They did not consider the impact of being blind on her studies, including associated health and financial issues coupled with the challenges of living in rented accommodation.

Inflexibility was also experienced regarding assessment tasks. One participant, who is blind, reported struggling with referencing conventions and completing visual multimedia assessment tasks that she could not physically see or manipulate. However, one academic who was teaching another subject in the same course was flexible, and 'they did accept an audio [submission] … that was the only course [she] passed' (P2). The needs of students with mental health challenges were also highlighted as a much-needed consideration when assessment tasks are developed and administered. For example the stress and anxiety that can be aggravated for some students being required to participate in group work. This issue is exemplified in the following comment:

> *I was doing study at TAFE and unfortunately because my father passed away I started to get depression quite bad. There was a lot of infighting by the other students [when they] gave project work … it's hard to work in a team with other people if their [*sic*] fighting with each other. (P5)*

Where flexibility with assessments was afforded to students, successful completion of the course was enabled and appreciated: 'they were pretty good in me being late, and they were pretty good in understanding my stories and how I put things and they were very good about it' (P3).

Staff did not intervene to support the students to problem solve how to work around rigid course structure and administrative practices, particularly regarding major family and cultural issues. One participant, who was trying to cope with the deaths of 10 close family members and friends, tried to downgrade her enrolment from a Masters degree to a Certificate or Diploma:

> *I did try to go to a certificate or a diploma, and the response was basically 'no … it is too much paper work' .. so I felt that I was locked in...whereas they originally, um said that it was a very flexible course. (P2)*

She expressed sadness and anger at the lack of flexibility and sensitivity on the institution's part, which insisted on recording failures on her academic record rather than a withdrawal notation. Additionally, they insisted on her providing evidence of the deaths of her family members if she wanted this situation reversed:

> *And I have got Fs all over (my academic record) and … you know they wouldn't even attend to that … and plus they wanted all of this stuff that I could not do … I could not make myself do it. They suggested that I had to go find the newspapers that (the death notices of my family) were in and present them as evidence. (P2)*

5.4 Theme 3: Barriers Associated With Indigeneity

This theme is presented under the following three sub-themes:

- social, economic, health and internal barriers
- Indigenous students being forced to travel a long way to undertake courses
- breakdowns in communication.

5.4.1 Social, Economic, Health and Internal Barriers

Participants expressed frustration about approaching the disability support unit for assistance and encountering a lack of understanding from staff regarding the challenges that they faced due to their Indigeneity. The following statements exemplify this:

> *The disability unit … I don't think they would have had an understanding about Indigenous background … I think it was this is what we can do … this is what we can't do … end of story!*
>
> *Life isn't straight forward for a lot of us especially … and I could say when you are single … but I am sure when you are married with a family its equally frustrating or challenging … and it could even be more so…*
>
> *I think we just have different challenges, but it can be difficult when you have to pay (for) your study as well as support yourself financially, emotionally…*

Because a lot of us in the Aboriginal community are probably not taking on study until we are mature … So you know I think these are important things to acknowledge…

And again I think a lot of people don't realise they have special needs because you don't have to have a physical disability to have a disability. Some people might not even realise that they might be dyslexic or have a learning disability. So there's some really complicated things that need to be probably looked into…

You know when you are not sure whether to continue with studies or you have had to give up because of reasons and I think a lot of us Aboriginal people … and I have seen it with other people … have had to give up because they support family as carers or family and kinship become number 1 and I have seen it with other students… So this is something that does impact on a lot of Aboriginal people and I saw some supports for that for some people. But I know it can be difficult for when people are unaware of the needs of our community and also how we support family. (P1)

In addition to the challenges described in this quote, other challenges were faced by participants who had been left with various other issues due to their Indigeneity and barriers with which they had struggled for their entire lives. For example, some had poor health and ongoing medical conditions, such as diabetes, heart problems and mental health issues: 'so put it this way I was sick three times that year and that really disrupted my studies' (P3). Another reported that 'I was out of breath, keeping up with them' and 'I started to get depression quite bad' (P5). Participants also mentioned that their health issues tipped the balance away from them being able to cope with study and work: 'I stopped that year because of health issues and then I was working part time' (P1).

Limited personal expectations presented another issue that contributed to barriers. When one participant who had succeeded at TAFE was asked if he would consider university

study, he responded: ‘but they [Indigenous people with a disability] need to know their limits, what they can and can’t do … nup uni’s not for me’ (P3). Another participant, reflecting on his own academic path, shared how he attributed his own limited personal expectations to his upbringing: ‘growing up on a farm, I was never told that I could be a scientist or a mathematician or anything like that’ (P5).

Financial hardship and carer responsibilities formed another barrier to engaging with further study: ‘one of the teachers … suggested that I go to uni but trouble was I was still facing depression and supporting young daughters and no money and … it just wasn’t really possible’ (P5).

5.4.2 Indigenous Students Being Forced to Travel a Long Way to Undertake Courses

Two participants raised another systemic barrier for Indigenous students with a disability: only a few select TAFEs offered courses based on Indigenous knowledge. One participant with multiple disabilities spoke with frustration about having to travel from the outskirts of Sydney to Redfern (near the city centre) to undertake a course when he lived directly next to a TAFE college. He found this particularly perplexing due to the knowledge that his local area had a large population of Indigenous residents: ‘I think they should be offering more courses at Blacktown, [there should be the] flexibility for disabled students to be able to choose the course in their own area rather than travel so far away’ (P3). The other participant who mentioned this same issue was studying in another state and shared that: ‘I only finished my studies last year, but it is a long way to travel from where I live’ (P4). Participants highlighted that travelling away from their home and community caused additional stress and health problems. Regarding travelling to Sydney away from family to study in block mode and stay in a hotel, one participant stated: ‘I was finding that because of the stress of it and not have the right food and enough sleep and enough fluids while I was down there [I was getting sick]’ (P5).

5.4.3 Breakdowns in Communication

Participants described their hesitation and that of their Indigenous peers in coming forwards and speaking with non-Indigenous counsellors and support staff:

> *Because some of them won't speak up for themselves. They [are] sort of you know shy and sensitive. But a lot of Indigenous students are sensitive. They get upset easily. I could just wish that Aboriginal people would study those courses and be counsellors because Aboriginal people can communicate better with Aboriginal support, Aboriginal people would feel more comfortable talking to their own kind. (P4)*

Indigenous students lacking critical knowledge and staff assuming that they did have knowledge of course requirements and administrative processes also presented an issue. One participant spoke of the expectation that they would be able to arrange their own placement. He attempted to do so but was unsuccessful. As he was studying as a distance student, the lecturer was unaware of his dilemma, resulting in his non-completion of his course at this final hurdle. He reflected that 'so the lecturers actually assumed that everyone was working in a school all the time and had access to what they needed to … and so if you weren't in that boat, then tough luck' (P5). Another participant spoke of not knowing where to go for guidance or knowing about available options upon the point of dropping out. Subsequently, she simply dropped out of university, rather than seeking a suspension or deferment of her studies: 'but it was just so difficult, you know you are so new and you don't know what to do and you have had to give up' (P2).

5.5 Theme 4: Importance of Positive Relationships

This theme is presented under two sub-themes: importance of respect and importance of care and trust.

5.5.1 Importance of Respect

Participants expressed pride in their families and communities: 'yeah well I'm proud of my family, proud of my culture, proud of my parents and my upbringing' (P4); and 'I have a lot of history in this town too … a lot of history in this area so what is recorded … but what is unrecorded is for 40,000 years or more' (P5). Feeling respected and accepted was highlighted as a motivator for diligent study and ultimate success. In particular, respect and acceptance from teaching and support staff was a clear contributor to encouraging students to persevere with their studies:

> *But when I commenced my studies at TAFE, I found everyone very understanding and welcoming … and so I was treated well, you know I would make sure that I just had the strength to keep on going with my determination and confidence. (P4)*

Participants expressed appreciation where respect was afforded to them, regardless of the staff member being Indigenous or otherwise. They appreciated and discussed the effectiveness of positive, caring staff attitudes: 'one [tutor] was Italian, but he mixed well with Aboriginal people and was just like one of the family' (P4); and 'he was a good teacher too in his own way because even though he was a white fella, he understood our Aboriginal ways and was respectful' (P3). Acts of kindness were remembered when staff had strived to help students overcome the barriers associated with disability and to enhance understanding: 'this lecturer brought in a fish for me to feel. I can't remember the context, but I thought you know they really tried to make it really practical' (P2)'. When participants were met with caring and supportive attitudes, these were recognised and cherished: 'they would take you and look after you … and they weren't going to let you just leave and say "I can't do it" ... they wanted everybody to feel looked after' (P1).

Conversely, frustration arose due to a lack of respect and understanding of what participants were going through and the obstacles that they were experiencing in their personal

life. One participant spoke of facing the loss of people she loved and attending 10 funerals in one year, with little understanding or compassion being extended to her: ‘two were my sisters, so I am the eldest now, two of my sisters, and my brother-in-law, and a very, very dear non-Indigenous friend who I had known for years as well’ (P2). Further, this participant highlighted how a lack of respect and understanding of how a person’s family and community function served to undermine her successful engagement with her studies:

> *You know … so it it was just horrific … they couldn’t seem to understand that when I would have to go home and I was travelling all around New South Wales … they could just not understand the logistics … when I go out far west … my people are in far west NSW … you are actually there for a week before you can come back, unless you have exorbitant airfares ... it is still 13 hours in the train ... they could just not understand how I couldn’t do my study because … where I was staying, I didn’t have wifi or anything like that ... it was just impossible to catch up. They just couldn’t understand it, you know, the logistics of it. (P2)*

5.5.2 Importance of Care and Trust

The third theme included students not knowing where to go for assistance. Further, the shared experience of three participants indicated a lack of caring or connection from the staff when they were at the point of dropping out: ‘they pretty much just let [me] go’ (P5). There did not appear to be active follow-up or counselling to see if there were other options available to the students: ‘there wasn’t any pastoral outreach or anything’ (P2). This sense of people not caring left participants with negative feelings towards their universities and TAFEs. Further, staff attitudes towards the participants had a significant impact on their self-confidence: ‘some staff you know have got distrust of people and “oh you are using your disability to get benefit”’ (P5).

The issue of relationships and poor communication in the online environment was also mentioned by participants in the context of communicating with teaching and support staff: ‘but sometimes it is difficult when nobody’s online and it’s not always easy and you have to go through teachers and justify everything … I think it just puts you off from study’ (P1). The lack of community and sense of social isolation from fellow students was also highlighted: ‘I felt that there was no community … sometimes they would send out a message saying that there was softball on or something … no I could not even dream of joining them ... just because of distances and that kind of thing’ (P2).

5.6 Theme 5: A Spirit of Resilience, Determination and Desire to Succeed

This theme is presented under two sub-themes: determination to succeed and work experience and transition to work.

5.6.1 Determination to Succeed

A spirit of resilience, determination and the desire to succeed was evident in all study participants. Those blind participants shared the difficulties they faced in the early days of study, before the development of ATs, when materials were developed and presented in a format that they could not read: ‘like I did three steps in assignments … first, I thought about what I had to write then I’d have to do it in Braille, then I’d have to record it or type it’ (P2). Further, additional challenges were created by not meeting any other Indigenous students, let alone Indigenous students with a disability, enrolled in the institution where they were studying: ‘I don’t even remember meeting Aboriginal people at all at that stage’ (P2).

All five participants undertook multiple attempts at studying in the higher education sector, demonstrating resilience, determination and a desire to succeed. For all, the experience had a lasting impact on their lives. For some, it introduced generational change within their families: ‘and that’s where I worked hard for them to have a good education … and I have 5 children and they all have had a good education … and they’ve all got good jobs now … so

its paid off for them' (P4). The love of study and dreams realised through the opportunity provided by education were warmly reported: 'I always loved to study, I always wanted to be a teacher that was what I always wanted to be even when I was tiny' (P2). Similarly reported was the sense of achievement when success was experienced, facilitated by appropriate supports: 'but some of the other courses I got a distinction and a high distinction, so it really, really showed me how well I could do when I had the support' (P1).

Where repeated attempts had been made to engage with higher education and failure was experienced, participants expressed feelings of regret about dreams that were never realised:

> *Because if I had finished my degrees, I probably would have had more of a chance … I wouldn't just be another administration officer … but I would have probably worked in areas that I would have preferred like counselling or social work. (P1)*

As previously reported under the first theme, participants carried a personal sense of being punished and blamed by the universities for their failure.

5.6.2 Work Experience and Transition to Work

For several participants, their continual attempts at higher education were encouraged by a lack of success in securing employment, as demonstrated by the following comment: 'I went into the second Diploma because I couldn't get work' (P5). Consequently, participants found themselves in a continuous cycle of undertaking education, accruing debts and experiencing frustration and failure when seeking employment: 'you get a letter back, you know, saying "thanks for your application"' (P4). This frustration regarding efforts to secure employment was experienced even by participants who had excelled academically, leading them to interpret their lack of success as discrimination: 'I also got a TAFE NSW medal, for the highest average mark across the state … yet I couldn't even get an interview for a one-month temporary position … being Aboriginal … being overweight … being old …being…'

(P5). The responsibility for this inability to utilise their education as a tool to close the gap in their life opportunities and provide economic security for themselves and their families was placed squarely upon the institutions where they were studying. No participants reported engaging with Disability Employment Services or receiving advice or awareness about the National Disability Coordination Officer program. In the absence of understanding the national systems in place to support people with a disability to engage with employment, participants expressed the expectation that the education provider would link them into employment:

> *Oh I think it would be nice if the TAFEs could find some, you know, work placement for some of the students when they are coming up to finishing their TAFE course to actually help them get into the workforce. Not just their favourite students or particularly the white ones that live in the right address, but all students. (P5)*

5.7 Summary of Findings from Qualitative Track Study One: Listening to the Voices

This study has enabled listening to the stories of five participants with lived experience as Indigenous students with a disability undertaking higher education in Australia. The findings were analysed under five key themes and several sub-themes. A summary of these themes, sub-themes and key issues are presented in Table 5.1. Chapter Six will collate the results of all research activities and triangulate the findings.

Table 5.1

Summary of Findings From Qualitative Track Study One: Listening to the Voices

Theme	Sub-theme	Key ideas
Theme 1: Barriers experienced due to institutions' variable and bureaucratic processes surrounding the provision of assistance	• Variable service delivery • Accessibility of learning materials	• Participants indicated that the service and support they received varied from institution to institution and within institutions, depending on whom they interfaced with. • For participants with sensory or learning disabilities, accessibility of learning materials and the availability of alternative formats was a key factor.
Theme 2: Barriers that were due to having a disability	• Indigenous perspective on disability and ableist attitudes • Lack of staff flexibility	• Participant stories revealed that the Indigenous perspective on disability has a double impact: o on how Indigenous staff interact with Indigenous participants who have a disability o on how students perceive, recognise and declare their disability.

Theme	Sub-theme	Key ideas
		• The impact of the flexibility of individual staff proved to be a common thread through all themes. Participants reported both positive and negative experiences associated with staff flexibility concerning their access and personal needs.
Theme 3: Barriers associated with Indigeneity	• Social, economic, health and internal barriers • Indigenous students being forced to travel a long way to undertake courses • Breakdowns in communication	• On approaching the disability support unit for assistance, participants experienced frustration regarding staff's lack of understanding regarding the challenges they faced arising from their Indigeneity. • Travel causing dislocation from family and community, imposing additional expenses and stress on daily living. • Participants experienced breakdowns in communication with teaching and administrative staff that undermined their success.

Theme	Sub-theme	Key ideas
Theme 4: Importance of positive relationships	• Importance of respect • Importance of care and trust	• When participants were met with caring and supportive attitudes, these were recognised and cherished, regardless of the staff member's racial background. • Relationships and poor communication in the online environment emerged as another key issue.
Theme 5: A spirit of resilience, determination and the desire to succeed	• Determination to succeed • Work experience and transition to work	• A spirit of resilience, determination and the desire to succeed was evident in all participants. All five participants undertook multiple attempts at studying in the higher education sector, demonstrating resilience, determination and the desire to succeed. For all, the experience had a lasting impact on their lives. • Participants also had poor experiences in transitioning to employment after undertaking study.

Theme	Sub-theme	Key ideas
		• Participants in a continuous cycle of undertaking education, accruing debts and experiencing frustration and failure when seeking employment, then enrolling in another course.

Chapter 6: Bringing it All Together

6.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together all research findings obtained using the mixed methods convergent parallel design, also utilising triangulation and thematic analysis (see Chapter Three). Feedback from the final Indigenous Advisory Group validation meeting is also incorporated into these combined findings.

This chapter also presents the framework that has emerged from this research: the *Framework for All*. The *Framework for All* is a decolonising and enabling framework to be used by all higher education providers to shape their response to meeting their legal, human rights and ethical obligations in supporting Indigenous students with a disability.

6.2 Converging the Studies

This phase of the convergent parallel design provided an analysis of where the two Tracks and three studies converged, revealing patterns that emerged from the combined findings. To do so, the results of Quantitative Track Studies One and Two were mapped against the themes from the Qualitative Track Study One (see Appendix F). Specific results from the Quantitative Track were mapped once only against the Qualitative Track themes; however, there is a high degree of intersectionality across a number of the themes and sub-themes. This process of converging the two Tracks revealed the following six key findings:

1. There exist systemic barriers for Indigenous students with a disability caused by institutions' variable and bureaucratic processes. Examples include the widespread requirement for medical diagnosis of a disability prior to assistance being provided and the lack of flexibility in course design, delivery and assessment.

2. The Indigenous perspective on disability was a dual consideration, resulting in Indigenous students not presenting for disability support and Indigenous staff not accessing disability services and supports for their students.
3. Institutional supports for Indigenous students and students with a disability were siloed into different areas, creating a lack of clarity for Indigenous students regarding where to go for help and placing them at risk of missing out on services and supports available to non-Indigenous students.
4. Participants reported systems that were non-cognisant of the additional barriers faced by them as students who were both Indigenous and had a disability.
5. Participants identified the ineffective transition from higher education to employment as a major frustration, with participants finding themselves in a continuous loop of attempting further qualifications to try to improve their life opportunities.
6. Participants revealed a desire for and appreciation of supportive and respectful communication with support services and a spirit of resilience, determination and the desire to succeed.

These six findings are discussed below, supported by the converged evidence from the three studies. Following the discussion of these six findings are a series of recommendations arising from the research and a proposed model against which institutions can gauge their current practice and address the research question of this thesis in the context of their own organisation:

> How can the higher education sector effectively support and scaffold the success of Indigenous students with a disability and assure their human rights to equity of access to higher education and the life opportunities that it provides?

6.3 Finding 1: Systemic Barriers

Both Tracks revealed systemic barriers for Indigenous students with a disability. Participants in Qualitative Track Study One indicated that the services and support they received were variable from institution to institution and within institutions, depending on whom they were interfacing with. They also suggested that the degree of support often depended on the individual lecturer's or disability support staff's willingness to offer support. The three participants who sought help or consideration from the institutions when they experienced a personal crisis found their efforts frustrated by rules, procedures and lack of flexibility. These three participants withdrew from their studies at the point of crisis without the benefit of any institutional interventions. It was noted that these three participants did not receive counselling, special provisions or advice regarding options such as taking a break from their studies with a pathway back when their crisis had abated. Three of the five participants did not seek assistance from disability support services, merely accepting the support they gained from their fellow students or Indigenous academics.

Analysis of the website audit findings (Quantitative Track Study One) supported the participants' experiences from Qualitative Track Study One. It revealed variability of service delivery relating to Indigenous students' supports and services generally and, by implication, to Indigenous students with a disability. The analysis revealed that this was the case for both Indigenous student support units and disability support units. Only seven (17.5%) universities provided the opportunity for Indigenous students with a disability to present directly for help without supporting medical documentation. One university noted a 10-step process through which all students must proceed to receive an annual LAP, also noting that, once it lapsed, a new LAP would need to be applied for and secured prior to the provision of further assistance. Another university also noted the need for students to have documentary evidence of their Aboriginality.

Analysis of these results indicated that universities focus on triaging the use of limited resources to support students rather than determining individuals' support needs to scaffold access to, engagement with and, ultimately, success in higher education. In any triaging system, institutional culture, values and priorities are embedded in the systems designed to ascertain who should receive support and who should not (Lang & Spitzer, 2020). As reported above, Quantitative Track Study Two revealed that only three DAPs reflected an appreciation for the Indigenous perspective on disability and focused on supporting this student cohort. Indigenous students with a disability who seek support from disability services are overwhelmingly doing so within institutions that do not express a stated priority to support Indigenous students. Further, reliance on the medical evidence of disability is discriminatory because Indigenous students with a disability are less likely to have had a formal diagnosis or previous supports in place before commencing their studies. To possess the documentation that is a prerequisite in 82.5 per cent of universities, an Indigenous student would need to recognise that they have a disability and be aware of and have access to specialist supports—in addition to the financial resourcing sufficient to access these specialist supports. Diagnosis of disability can involve an expensive process. The current evidence suggests that Australian Indigenous people with a disability are not yet receiving supports equitably through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (Ferdinand et al., 2019). Requirements for medical evidence of disability place Indigenous students with a disability (and without an NDIS plan) at an immediate disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous students who have an NDIS plan and the evidentiary documentation at hand to support their claim for assistance.

From their research, which was funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research, into the support services of two universities in Victoria, Fossey et al. (2017) produced findings that are consistent with this study. They noted a 14-step process prior to

students with a disability receiving support and stated that all 25 participants with a disability reported that gaining reasonable adjustments was:

> A complex and variable process. Actions and decisions related to reasonable adjustments were made at multiple points during a student's engagement with an educational institution; they involved multiple parties, each with their own values and beliefs, and were made in the context of balancing student learning needs within the often competing social, legal, and financial imperatives of the institution (p. 825).

Due to their Indigeneity, Indigenous students with a disability are further exposed to the vagaries of complex processes that involve multiple staff triaging supports and making decisions regarding their entitlement to support. These barriers to support are created at an institutional rather than a government level and potentially breach the legislation that mandates equity of access to education and training for all students with a disability. Therefore, a framework is needed that removes this barrier that discriminates against Indigenous students with a disability.

6.3.1 Variability in Accessibility and Flexibility of Curriculum

Another systemic barrier evidenced by both Tracks was the lack of flexibility in how a curriculum is developed, delivered and assessed. Although it is unlawful for institutions to develop, deliver or accredit inaccessible curricula or training courses (DDA, 1992; DESE, 2005), both Tracks provided evidence suggesting that this does occur.

As reported in Chapter Four (Qualitative Track Study One), participants shared their experiences of learning materials not being accessible to ATs and staff not being prepared to modify requirements to enable their participation and success. This response to students indicates that staff were not aware of:

- their obligations under the legislation to make adjustments (DDA, 1992; DESE, 2005)

- the tools of UDL to enable access (Bracken & Novak, 2019; Lang et al., 2021; Olaussen et al., 2019)
- the Indigenous perspective on disability, and that their students were not necessarily receiving supports from elsewhere in the institution
- the intersection between disability and Indigeneity (Gilroy, 2009b).

The websites audit revealed that no universities offered ATs or training in accessibility features of mainstream technologies for Indigenous students with a disability. These combined findings demonstrate that there is a current need for a greater understanding of universal design principles and the use of ATs to enable access for students with a disability in our higher education sector.

6.4 Finding 2: The Indigenous Perspective on Disability

The Indigenous perspective on disability was a dual consideration, with Indigenous students not presenting for disability support and Indigenous staff not accessing disability services and support for their students. There exists intersectionality between the Indigenous perspective on disability and every finding of this study. Across both Tracks, evidence illustrated that the Indigenous perspective on disability is reflected in how Indigenous students interacted with the institution and how Indigenous staff interacted with the students. Indigenous students with a disability did not:

- recognise that their particular challenge was labelled as a disability for which assistance was available
- wish to identify and adopt what they perceived to be a deficit label
- find the requirements for verifying their entitlement achievable or desirable
- have an awareness that their education provider had a legal obligation to provide learning materials in an accessible format and, therefore, did not seek alternative formats of texts to enable access

- undergo testing to secure the evidence of disability required by support services
- know about the use of ATs to enable access.

Both Track One and Two revealed the significant impact of ignorance regarding the Indigenous perspective on disability within institutions that provide support based on Western medical model perspectives on disability. As reported under Finding 1 above, three of the five participants did not seek support from a disability support unit. It is particularly telling that all five students were undertaking studies with Indigenous academics; however, none of the Indigenous staff either referred them to disability support services or advocated for greater flexibility and accommodation. The staff's lack of awareness of services and support available for Indigenous students with a disability limited their access and inclusion opportunities. Upon discussing this finding with the Indigenous Advisory Group, all members concurred that, in their communities, people are not labelled or defined by their disability. Even with family members, their disability is not considered; they are simply 'Aunt or Uncle'. Crucially, this finding supports the supposition that—rather than being agents of ongoing colonisation and enforcers of Western ways of doing and knowing—the Indigenous staff are unaware of the disability of their Indigenous students. Thus, it does not occur that support beyond what they can offer should be offered or flexibility extended. Indigenous students with a disability either not recognising that they have a disability or exhibiting a stoic attitude of coping on their own or 'making do' results in a situation where Indigenous students with a disability are disadvantaged in their endeavours within the higher education sector.

The significance of this finding is that a framework designed to meet the needs of Indigenous students with a disability will need to be cognisant of the Indigenous perspective on disability (Gilroy, 2009b; Hollinsworth, 2013; Rivas Velarde, 2018). It will need to recognise that students may not seek help or may not have a diagnosis and Indigenous staff may not be aware that non-Indigenous students with the same challenges are receiving

additional services and supports. Further, it will need to appreciate the pride demonstrated by Indigenous students with a disability for who they are and their unwillingness to be defined by a deficit label. In the meeting with the Indigenous Advisory Group, I raised the issue of shame regarding disability. I did this because, when presenting the preliminary findings of this research at the 2018 Pathways Conference in Sydney, some delegates raised this as an omission from the research, claiming that their experience was that Indigenous students were ashamed to come for support (Kerr & Gilroy, 2018). I shared with the Indigenous Advisory Group my observation that none of the five participants indicated shame about their disability but rather pride for their achievements and who they were. The Group responded that my observations were consistent with their experiences; they believed that Indigenous students with a disability did not feel shame—rather, it was the system that shamed and stereotyped them. Further, Indigenous students did not want to engage with a system that would do this to them.

6.5 Finding 3: Siloed Institutional Supports Across Campus

Institutional supports for Indigenous students and students with a disability were siloed into different areas, creating a lack of clarity for Indigenous students regarding where to go for help and placing them at risk of missing out on services and supports available to non-Indigenous students. This finding was consistent in all studies across Tracks One and Two; the Indigenous Advisory Group final meeting also confirmed it. All participants in the Qualitative Track Study One relayed confusion about the roles of different centres in providing disability support. For the three of the five participants who did not seek help from the disability support units, their impression was that those services were not for people like them—but rather for people with ‘real’ disabilities. They expressed no understanding of the depth of services available to access either the built or learning environment. Conversely, the two participants who sought support from the disability support units did not receive support or services from the Indigenous support unit or connect with other Indigenous students. The website audit

provided evidence of disability services and Indigenous support services working in separate areas of the universities, with little cross-collaboration. None of the universities provided information on their disability services website regarding the availability of Indigenous staff for students to contact. Only seven of the universities' Indigenous support services pages indicated support services available to students with a disability. The 2020 review of the DAPs, which are usually created by the disability support units, further indicated services being siloed into different areas, with only three mentioning Indigenous students.

Overall, the three studies identified three pathways that were open to Indigenous students with a disability that led to Indigenous students with a disability missing out on support and services (see Table 6.1). How these pathways operate, and the relationship between them, can be seen in Figure 6.1.

Table 6.1

Support Path Options for Indigenous Students With a Disability Enrolling in Higher Education

Path	Option taken	Outcome
1	Not declare their disability or Indigeneity	• Receive no support from either disability or Indigenous support services • Engage with learning unsupported
2	Seek support from disability services	• Need to provide supporting documentation classifying their disability and stipulating support needs to disability support services • The disability support unit makes a subjective decision regarding whether the student will receive support. If they do not have the documentation or are not chosen to receive support, they will continue to engage with their learning unsupported. (Students taking this path in Qualitative Track Study One also missed out on Indigenous support services or meeting other Indigenous students.)
3	Seek support from Indigenous support services	• Students taking this path in Qualitative Track Study One missed out on receiving support from disability support services. (Both Quantitative Track Studies showed a lack of connectivity between Indigenous services and disability support.)

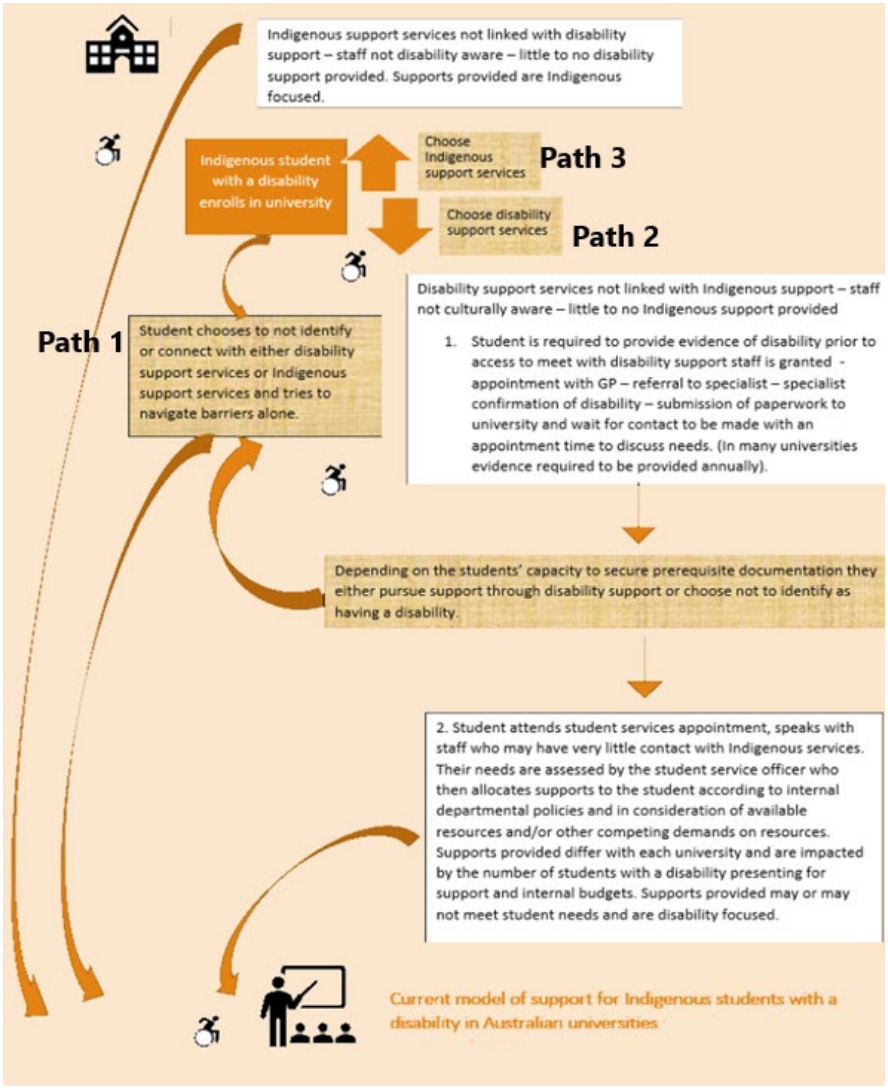

Figure 6.1

Current Support Path for Indigenous Students With a Disability in Australian Universities

6.6 Finding 4: Systems Are Non-Cognisant of the Additional Barriers Faced by Indigenous Students With a Disability

All three studies supported the finding that the higher education system is unaware of the challenges Indigenous students with a disability face in undertaking higher education. This is reflected in:

- the lack of consultation with Indigenous staff and students in the formation of DAPs

- the siloing of Indigenous and disability support services in different sectors of the university (see Finding 3)
- the testimonies of the participants.

All five participants reported a lack of awareness regarding the barriers they faced by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. From Indigenous staff, lack of understanding concerned the impact of their disability, with faculty being unwilling to make reasonable adjustments to course requirements. From the participants' accounts, it appears that the Indigenous staff were committed to treating all students equally rather than equitably and that there was not an understanding of their legal responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for students with a disability. Three of the five participants reported the Indigenous staff focusing on sticking to the rules and treating all students the same. Indigenous academics may have responded in this way to Indigenous students with a disability due to their lack of understanding of disability generally or how the impact of disability is best mitigated within the learning environment. Alternatively, it may relate to them trying to establish their own places as Indigenous academics within the higher education sector. Burgess (2016) has provided an explanation for Indigenous school teachers pushing compliance requirements on students that also resonates with the higher education sector:

> Early career Aboriginal teachers often find themselves in unpredictable and unfamiliar places which can be a source of dissonance within themselves and between the school and the local Aboriginal community. Discourses such as these emphasise the relationships of power at the cultural interface and how they can discursively position teacher subjectivity. Within this milieu, Aboriginal teachers may enact any or all of these discourses, and move between resistance and compliance. An Aboriginal teacher who complies with this normalisation, by providing a form of role modelling and

> mentoring sanctioned by the dominant culture, is conversant with the dominant discourses of accountability and accreditation. (p. 748)

Regardless of the reasons for academics being unwilling to be flexible and make reasonable adjustments for their Indigenous students with a disability, the framework resulting from this thesis required components that respond to this way of doing. It needed to liberate Indigenous academics from their perceived role as upholders of the system and standards to see their students as individuals and respond flexibly to meet their learning needs.

From non-Indigenous staff, participants reported that there was no awareness of or respect for their culture and their way of doing and their personal history. Further, additional challenges were caused by their:

- **caring responsibilities** for their families and their general responsibilities to their communities
- **housing insecurity** and the impact of this on their ability to focus on their studies—this was reported by four of the five participants, who spoke of having to cover rent, move during their studies or undertake long commutes to the educational institution[5]
- **financial difficulties** in covering costs associated with the course requirements—for one participant, the price of petrol to travel to block studies was crippling and led to the investment of time and effort in self-advocacy to seek reimbursement of petrol costs

[5] Indigenous households suffer double the amount of rental stress compared to the general population, spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent (ABS, 2016).

- **lack of access to reliable internet or computer facilities** in their place of residence to engage in compulsory online components of their courses such as submitting assessment tasks and communication with academics
- **impact of the health conditions of themselves**, families and broader community and the personal psycho-social implications of losing family and community members
- **lack of understanding of the higher education system** and how to navigate processes such as making complaints, organising course placements or options available to them
- **the additional burden of course travel requirements** placed on them, explicitly noted with block release programs requiring travel to city centres and Indigenous-specific courses offered only at specific campuses. Both sets of arrangements may seem reasonable and like they would not affect Indigenous students without a disability; however, the travel requirements resulted in the discontinuation of further studies for three participants.

Without an appreciation of and respect for all these listed factors, participants again faced inflexible attitudes from non-Indigenous staff, relaying experiences of feeling forgotten that led to them withdrawing from their studies because they could no longer cope. Due to this finding, it is proposed that systems that acknowledge and respond to the challenges faced by Indigenous students with a disability are needed to support student retention and success. Quantitative Track Study One revealed that individual universities had introduced various programs to support Indigenous students (see Table 4.3). However, all participants' experiences were that assistance relating to their life challenges was not received—they were not linked to any of these services. Quantitative Track Study Two confirmed that the disability support units and the university leadership developing the DAPs are not inclusive of the needs

of Indigenous students with a disability. Therefore, the framework developed in accordance with the study findings needed to address this breakdown in linking Indigenous students with a disability with services developed for the general Indigenous student body and the general student body with disabilities, and cater to the additional challenges faced by Indigenous students with a disability. Further, due to their Indigenous perspective on disability, Indigenous students may not identify as having a disability. Therefore, disability support must be normalised within the framework.

6.7 Finding 5: Ineffective Transition From Higher Education to Employment

This finding was raised as a significant frustration in Qualitative Track Study One. All participants shared their experiences of being in a continuous loop of attempting further qualifications to improve their life opportunities. Both studies in the Quantitative Track confirmed that transition support for Indigenous students or students with a disability is not generally part of current strategic planning or institutional practice. The final validation meeting with the Indigenous Advisory Group further confirmed the significance of this finding and the necessity of it being addressed by the higher education sector.

Collectively, the three studies provided evidence that:

- Few universities offered employment programs for students while studying.
- Where there were internship programs, they were not being accessed by Indigenous students with a disability.
- It is problematic if the structure of the internship programs assume students to have the capacity to secure their placements.
- Support for transition from study to employment was not factored into the majority of DAPs.

All participants who shared their stories in the Qualitative Track Study reported an ongoing cycle of undertaking education, attempting to secure employment, being unsuccessful and then undertaking further education. Of the five participants, only one was successful in securing employment. Once employed, this participant, who secured employment after many years of unemployment and being caught in the cycle of continued attempts at university-level courses, was affected by a government debt accumulated for courses that they unsuccessfully attempted. Government debt was not an issue of concern for the other four participants; they had not been successful in securing employment at a level that made them liable for fee help repayment, which also supports this finding.[6]

Figure 6.2 explains the cycle in which the Indigenous participants with a disability found themselves and the need for assistance with an effective transition to employment. All participants attempted multiple courses; each time they progressed through the cycle, greater government debt was accumulated.

[6] In 2020, the threshold income to trigger repayment was $46,620 (Australian Taxation Office, 2020).

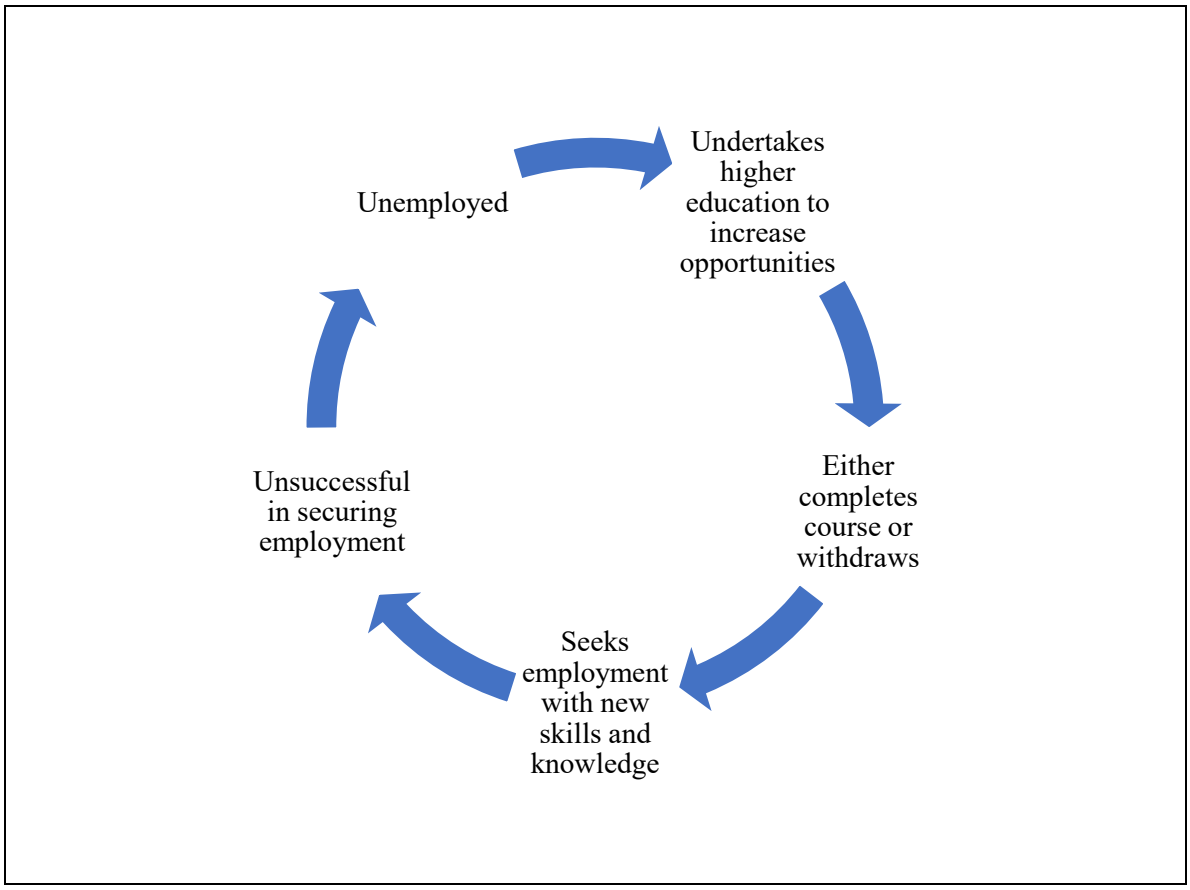

Figure 6.2
Cycle of Study and Unemployment Experienced by Indigenous Students With a Disability

For all participants, this cycle of undertaking education and still not securing professional employment was a source of great disappointment and frustration. Frustrated efforts to secure employment were experienced even by participants who had excelled academically, leaving them to interpret their lack of success as discrimination due to their Indigeneity or disability. Participants reported that they had not been able to obtain financial security for themselves and their families or achieve the vocational goals to which they had aspired.

Demoralising communications received by the participants when applying for jobs were identified as having negative effects on mental health. This indicates that, in addition to the participants not being provided with an effective transition to employment opportunities,

they were also not prepared for the subjective system of recruitment and how best to prepare themselves to engage with this and manage their own self care in the event of being unsuccessful. None of the participants accessed support services or employment transition services offered to the general student body or expressed awareness of their existence. For all participants, ambitious for success and financial security, the only route they could visualise upon meeting failure was undertaking further education.

In Australia, having a disability or being Indigenous creates barriers to the opportunity to participate in employment. The frustration experienced by those participants who shared their stories in the Qualitative Track reflects a situation experienced by Indigenous Australians generally—typically, they are not transitioning effectively from study to employment (ABS, 2016). Therefore, due to the need to consider the Indigenous perspective on disability, the framework arising from this thesis needed to focus on the effective transition from studying to employment with an approach that can be adopted more broadly for all Indigenous students, not purely for Indigenous students with a declared disability.

6.8 Finding 6: Communication, Resilience and the Desire to Succeed

Predominantly, this finding arose from the Qualitative Track Study and the validation meeting held with the Indigenous Advisory Group. Participants revealed a desire for and appreciation of supportive and respectful communication from support services and displayed a spirit of resilience, determination and the desire to succeed. Findings from both the Quantitative Track Studies demonstrated that the current colonised way of supporting students has not been contextualised for supporting Indigenous students with a disability, with little evidence of attempts to extend respectful offers of support.

A vital element of this finding was that the Indigenous participants were open to support from non-Indigenous staff and students when they felt respected, listened to and not rushed. Support staff who engaged in this manner were referred to as ‘friends’ and ‘family’. When

participants were seen for who they were, listened to and responded to in a supportive way, rather than being triaged through a bureaucratic system, participants engaged with their studies and flourished. For non-Indigenous teaching and support staff, this represents a crucial lesson. To be effective, they must display genuine respect and meet Indigenous students with a disability at their point of need to enable full engagement. There is also a need to take time to listen and walk alongside the students. As reported in Chapter Five, participants in Qualitative Track Study One recognised and appreciated when staff stepped outside of their institutional role and saw the Indigenous participants with a disability for who they were and displayed deep, genuine care for them and their families. All participants shared their hurt and vulnerability due to negative communication with staff; however, shared equally was their willingness to embrace positive relationships.

Further, all participants repeatedly attempted higher education, even when their efforts had been frustrated by an inaccessible curriculum, inflexible systems and discriminatory attitudes from staff. In all instances, their motivation was a better life for themselves, their families and their communities. All participants sought to learn to equip themselves to both earn and serve. None of the participants displayed attitudes of resistance or resentment towards the university and TAFE support services; their lack of access to support was not due to an unwillingness to engage but rather due to not knowing that support was available or how to source it. As individuals, they wanted to keep going, keep striving and be seen and respected by the institutions. Acts of kindness were noted and remembered.

Therefore, the framework generated from this research had to include the need for authentic caring relationships of support and a human rights approach to service delivery rather than subjective triaging that decides who receives support and who does not. Supportive and authentic communication from an institution to the Indigenous student with a disability begins with their general communication to the student cohort. As reported in Chapter Four,

Quantitative Track Study One revealed that none of the 40 universities provided Indigenous students with the name of an Indigenous staff member to contact on their disability page, and only one university provided the names and contact details of staff on their Indigenous pages. Further information for both Indigenous student support and support for students with a disability was challenging to locate on the websites (see Tables 4.6–4.7). Therefore, the framework had to address this current deficit.

6.9 Framework for the Australian Higher Education Sector in Supporting Indigenous Students With a Disability: The *Framework for All*

Imperatives from the converged findings of the studies undertaken for this project have highlighted the need for the higher education sector to change how it currently provides support for Indigenous students with a disability. Table 6.2 maps these imperatives against components required by a decolonising framework to address these imperatives. Alongside this is the mapping of where the responsibility for change rests. In turn, this has provided the basis for the development of the new framework and its holistic implementation model.

Table 6.2

Mapping of Imperatives Arising From Converged Findings Against Required Response and Ownership of Responsibility

Imperative	Response to imperative	Location of responsibility
Respect for and acknowledgment of Indigenous history	• Cultural safety	• All aspects of institutional life
Culturally safe environment for Indigenous students, where they know that they, their families and their communities are respected	• Cultural safety	• All aspects of institutional life
Services and support that are cognisant of the Indigenous perspective on disability and cater for the impact factors of students not identifying as either having a disability or requesting support or Indigenous staff not connecting their students with available disability support services	• Cultural safety • Indigenous perspective on diasbility • Universal design of learning	• Support and teaching staff
Australian higher education sector mandated to meet their legal, human rights and ethical obligations in supporting Indigenous students with a disability	• Cultural safety • Universal design of learning	• Commonwealth, state and territory govenments • Licensing bodies (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards

Imperative	Response to imperative	Location of responsibility
		Agency, Australian Skills Quality Authority)
Removal of current barriers created by institutions via their internal procedures and processes that effectively discriminate against Indigenous students with a disability	• Person-centredness	• Senior leadership setting internal policies impacting on support structures • Support units developing and enforcing internal policies
Embracing the principles of universal design and the use of assistive technologies to enable students to use mainstream assistive technologies to access their learning materials, thus mitigate the need for disclosure regarding disability	• Universal Design of Learning	• Teaching staff
Provision of tools for embedding flexibility and access across all curriculum and higher education systems	• Universal Design of Learning	• Senior leadership (setting policies) • Management (setting and monitoring procedures)

Imperative	Response to imperative	Location of responsibility
		• Teaching and support staff (following policies and procedures)
Normalisation of access to disability support services and the removal of shame created by triaging responses and interrogating Indigenous students with a disability regarding their support requests	• Person-centredness • Cultural safety	• Senior leadership (setting policies) • Management (setting and monitoring procedures) • Teaching and support staff (following policies and procedures)
Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics becoming liberated and empowered to respond flexibly and with fluidity to the access needs of Indigenous students with a disability	• Person-centredness • Cultural safety	• Senior leadership (setting policies) • Teaching staff
The breaking down of siloing of services within institutions and Indigenous students with a disability linked with services developed for:	• Person-centredness • Cultural safety	• Senior leadership (setting policies)

Imperative	Response to imperative	Location of responsibility
• the general student body • the general student body with a disability • the general Indigenous student body. Each of these should cater to the additional challenges faced by Indigenous students with a disability		• Management (setting and monitoring procedures) • Teaching and support staff (following policies and procedures)
Support to transition Indigenous students with a disability effectively from higher education to employment	• Person-centredness	• Teaching and support staff
Focus on authentic caring relationships between university staff and Indigenous students with a disability and a human rights approach to service delivery rather than subjective institutional triaging of support	• Person-centredness	• Teaching and support staff
Clear and readily available information on where to obtain assistance, what assistance is available and who is to provide it	• Universal Design of Learning • Person-centredness	• Whole institution

In response to these imperatives, a new framework was proposed that merges the strengths of the disability advocacy, social inclusion and Indigenous and disability human rights movements. This framework shifts the focus of access to higher education from being an exclusive opportunity for the powerful or selected to a human right for all. Globally and locally, access to higher education has long been recognised as a human right and included in global conventions and legislation (see Appendix H).

Further, the framework can be applied by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff across Australian institutions for higher education. The framework embraces the principles of PC support, cultural safety and UDL, placing Indigenous students with a disability at the centre of the model, rather than as an outsider trying to negotiate a system (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3

The Framework For All

In this decolonisation framework, cultural safety first addresses the physical and human environment of our institutions, universal design addresses the accessibility of the learning and assessment materials and, finally, PC support addresses the attitudes and practice of higher education staff from all areas of the institution. PC support places the needs of the individual, rather than the institution, at the heart of all that is done. PC support interconnects with cultural safety; however, for those with roles within the institution, such as student support practitioners, PC delves deeper into active advocacy and the building of supportive relationships.

These principles provide a practical and easy-to-understand guide for institutions and their frontline teaching and support staff to structure their supports for students more broadly and include Indigenous students with a disability specifically. Both Qualitative Track Study One and the study conducted by Fossey et al. (2017) found that students with a disability chose to disclose 'their disability directly to the teaching staff with whom they felt comfortable' (p. 825). Therefore, this framework is for all staff, not just those nominated as providing support services. Collectively, the requirements are for staff to be reflective of their practices and values, respectful of others' values, flexible in their responses to Indigenous students with a disability and committed to placing the needs of the individual above those of the institution.

From an institutional perspective, there is a need to step away from the current way of providing support. This study has shown that internal bureaucracies and the medical model of triaging disability supports are ineffective in supporting Indigenous students with a disability and wasteful in terms of staff resourcing. Insisting on medical evidence of disability before providing support is inappropriate for students who have undiagnosed or undisclosed disabilities. Further, there must be a commitment to strong linkages and collaboration between various support areas across campus, including programs for the general student body such as

traineeship programs, career guidance, employment transition and housing and financial support.

6.10 Implementing the *Framework for All*

This section addresses the implementation of the *Framework for All* (see Figure 6.3), underpinned by the imperatives listed in Table 6.2, across the Australian higher education sector. It includes practical considerations, change management implications and opportunities for financial savings. As indicated in Table 6.2, to effect change to ensure the successful inclusion of Indigenous students with a disability, the whole sector needs to take carriage of responsibilities and examine and respond to the current colonising practice. Figure 6.4 illustrates how a wholistic approach will involve:

- government and licensing bodies responsible for curriculum and certification of teaching and training staff playing their role in insisting on and incentivising compliance with current legislation, including the DDA (1992), Education Standards (DESE, 2005) and the UNCRPD
- senior leadership, in setting the policies, strategic direction and culture of the organisation
- management, in developing procedures to enable teaching and support staff to respond effectively and appropriately to Indigenous students with a disability, including undertaking training in cultural safety and PC
- support and teaching staff:
    i. undertaking training in cultural safety, universal design and PC
    ii. working closely together to identify students who need support and avail them of it
    iii. embracing new ways of doing to enable access and inclusion.

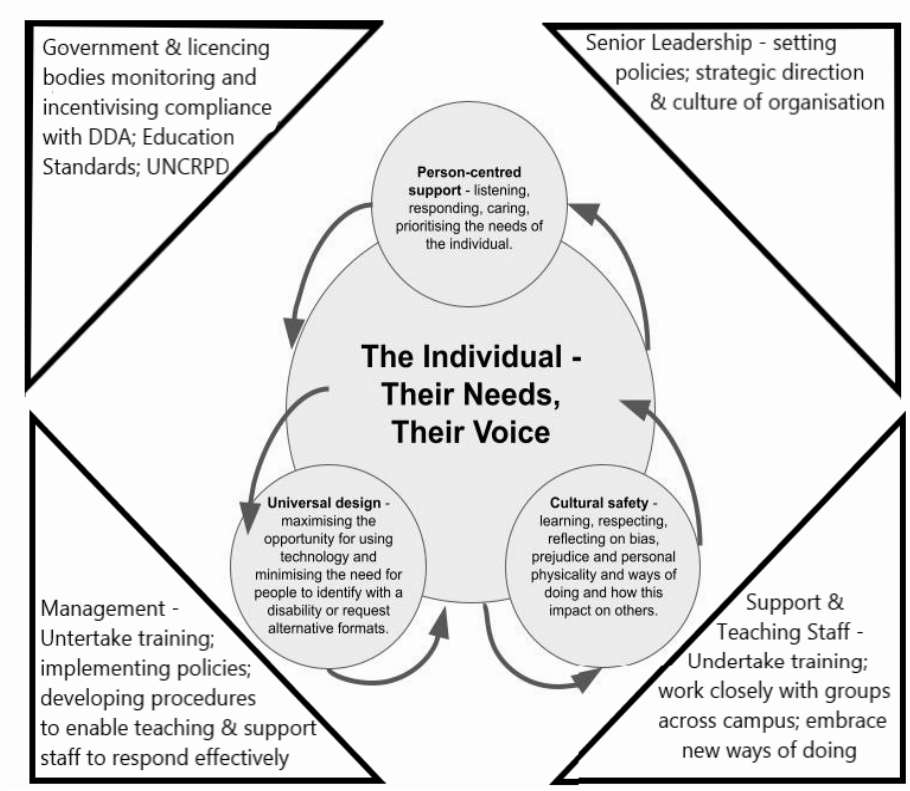

Figure 6.4

Wholistic Implementation Model for the Framework for All

6.10.1 Government Incentivising Compliance

Both Tracks of this research provided evidence that institutions are not compliant with existing legislation; further, there do not appear to be any incentives in place for them to be so. An opportunity exists for the government to:

- extend its current accessibility mandate put in place for all government departments and funded agencies (Australian Government, n.d.; Digital Transformation Agency, n.d.) to the higher education sector
- monitor and ensure that DAPS are being implemented across the sector and require the AHRC to expose non-compliant institutions to the government.

In Australia, the importance of cultural safety in Indigenous education has been recognised by both state and commonwealth governments (Department of the Prime Minister

and Cabinet, 2009; New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, 2011). It is now widely accepted that all students benefit from a learning space governed by the principles of cultural safety (MacFarlane et al., 2007). One of the recommendations given by the 2012 *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was that responsibility for supporting Indigenous students be embedded across all areas of the university (Behrendt, 2012). It is now time for the government to insist on cultural safety in all of the institutions it funds.

The Commonwealth Government has allocated funds that could be accessed by institutions to implement the changes suggested by the *Framework for All*. In June 2020, the Minister for Education announced $500 million per year of funding for programs to support Indigenous students; universities could access such funding to design and fund their programs (Ministers' Media Centre, 2020). This was later presented in the 2020 Commonwealth budget and passed in the Australian Parliament in October 2020 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). The next step to be taken by the government is to mandate change in the same manner that they have done for their internal operations and direct institutions to access available funds to implement necessary change.

6.10.2 Institutional Senior Leadership

Leadership that is both ethical and robust will be critical in implementing the framework. This framework calls for a change in institutional and sector culture and a willingness to question and, where required, change current practice. For an institution to embrace PC and cultural safety regarding their students, senior executives must embrace these principles in their interactions with staff. It is the senior executive that set the culture of the organisation. Managerialism and changes to funding models have shifted the leadership of institutions to what Bass and Riggio (2005) have described as transactional management, where staff are rewarded in return for meeting set targets and achieving efficiencies. However, the

Framework for All also requires leadership to possess the skills to transform the organisation. According to Bass and Riggio (2005):

> Transformational leaders, are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity. Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization. (p. 3)

While leadership must embrace a transformational approach, implementation of the *Framework for All* has the potential to deliver efficiencies and student support savings for institutions to align with goals of transactional management. This research revealed resource-intensive triaging processes across the higher education sector. Figure 6.5 illustrates the current procedures for Indigenous students with a disability requiring reasonable adjustments due to disability if they approach the disability support unit.

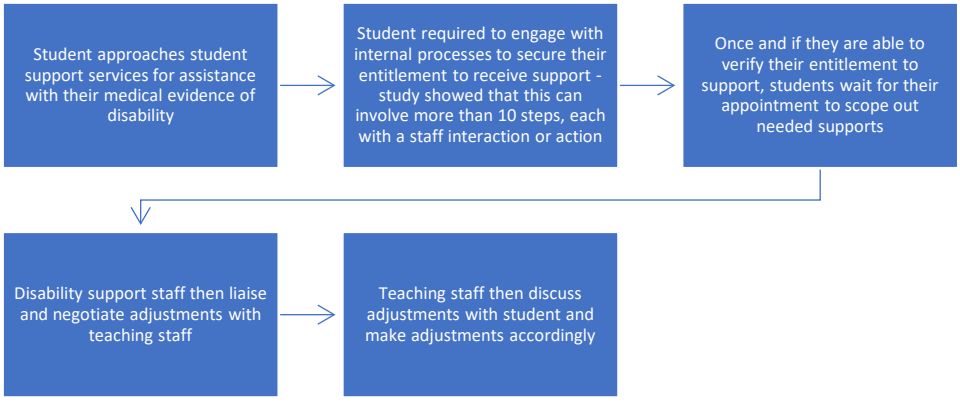

Figure 6.5

Current Process for Students to Receive Reasonable Adjustments

This process chart does not capture additional expenses associated with student complaints, the additional burden on teaching staff teaching students with a disability who are unsupported or institutional costs related to students not completing their studies. With the current way of doing, the risk of non-completion for Indigenous students is 45 per cent; for students with a disability, it is 35 per cent compared with 30 per cent for the general student cohort (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2018). With resources redirected to providing support rather than assessing entitlement, institutions have the opportunity to embrace a new way of organising support for students. As illustrated in Figure 6.6, institutions may (in line with practice in the school sector) choose to redirect assistance and support directly into the teaching space (be it online or face-to-face), to enable students to have direct communication with those who can facilitate access and engagement. The illustrated approach streamlines the current complex and resource-hungry procedures in place across the higher education sector, as evidenced by this research. It places support where Indigenous students with a disability are looking for support—with their teaching staff. It implies a relationship between the teaching staff and the student and a desire to provide them with required adjustments. It also implies that teaching staff are trained and have planned their curriculum to offer flexible assessment and engagement options to students with a disability, should they be required. In their research on the retention and success of students with a disability in Australian higher education, Kilpatrick et al. (2016) concluded that ‘relationships were important and were credited with contributing to the success and retention of students with disability’ (p. 754). Additionally, the OECD recommendations for supporting people with a disability call for more simplified supports and a PC approach (OECD, 2018).

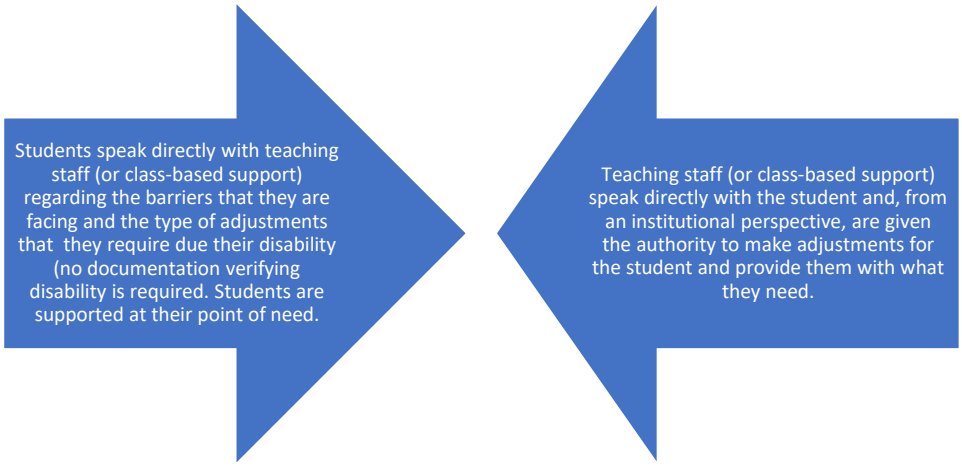

Figure 6.6

An Example of How an Institution Could Redirect Current Resourcing Away From the Vetting of Student Entitlement to Support to Providing Direct Student Support in the Teaching Spaces

This example of how the *Framework for All* could be applied demonstrates the role of transformational leadership. As a decolonising framework, the way of doing—whatever is decided—will be different, requiring skilled change management and a caring approach from leadership. Caring transformational leadership is aligned with PC. This alignment with the decolonising framework, the *Framework for All*, is exemplified by Tomkins and Simpson (2015) whose examination of caring leadership concluded that:

> Caring leadership concerns both what we can grasp and know and what we can only glimpse or sense. In practice, it can be directive and transactional, as well as emancipating and inspirational. It demands a balancing of stepping in with standing back; gauging whether and how to remove power from, or grant power to, others; and bearing responsibility for what emerges through both emphatic and vaguer modes of knowing (p. 112)

6.10.3 Management, Support and Teaching Staff: Training and Procedures

Upon reviewing the *Framework for All* with the Indigenous Advisory Group for this research, it was unanimously stressed that, where staff training is necessary for the cultural safety component, it must be conducted by Indigenous trainers. In response to this, a model is presented in Figure 6.7 that involves the management team securing its own Indigenous Advisory Group. This Advisory Group could be drawn from Indigenous staff, students, external Indigenous specialists in disability, community members and others deemed appropriate to be included by Indigenous leadership. Members of the group must be cognisant of the Indigenous perspective on disability and the general challenges Indigenous students face when interfacing with the institution. By sitting with this Advisory Group, management will gain insights concerning the current barriers typically faced by Indigenous students and those faced explicitly by Indigenous students with a disability. Planning can then commence for cultural safety training of all staff and changes to institutional policies and procedures (see Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7

Model for Change Management to Implement the Framework for All—With Institutional Management and Staff Surrendering to the Oversight of Those With an Indigenous Standpoint

This Model for Change Management to implement the *Framework for All* is based on the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 3.1, which was used to guide the cultural safety of my research activities as a non-Aboriginal woman. This model embeds the conditions for ensuring the presence of Indigenous standpoint, as set by Gilroy (2009a). The model reflects a shift of power in the relationship of Indigenous key stakeholders with institutional management and staff. It demonstrates surrendering and submissiveness by those two groups to those with an Indigenous standpoint. The role of the Indigenous Advisory Group is to:

- be the lived experience specialists working actively with the team
- oversee everything proposed and implemented by management to ensure that the needs of Indigenous students with a disability are being served.

The group will not be an external advisory body brought in as consultants to answer questions set by management. It will have authority and power to speak and interact with the

team in an equal working relationship, set the agenda and have the power of veto. This approach supports what Figart (2017) has proposed is necessary for progressive institutional change: 'institutional change requires peeling back the façade and looking within institutions. Institutional change — involves changes in the value structure of an institution' (p. 263). The *Framework for All* proposes the decolonising of the higher education sector's institutions and, in so doing, the meeting of their legal and human rights obligations to Indigenous students with a disability.

6.11 Summary: *Framework for All*

This chapter has brought together the findings from all research components, culminating in the proposal of a framework to guide institutions in their planning to support Indigenous students with a disability. The *Framework for All* is a decolonising framework that proposes a change in our institutions' power relationships—situating at its very centre the individual, their needs and their voice.

Pidgeon (2016) researched the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous students in universities in Canada and presented a holistic framework that is also consistent with the *Framework for All*. Similarly, she places the individual at the centre with numerous supports reaching to the person from the outer rings of governance, providing physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional support (Pidgeon, 2016). In her model, there is no assumption that the Indigenous students would reach out for assistance. Notably, the *Framework for All* has two-way arrows signifying the teaching staff and support systems reaching out to Indigenous students with a disability respectfully and responsively to their needs, voice and agenda. Further, it embeds the promise that they will receive support if they ask for it without encountering further barriers. Instead, their experience will be one of meaningful access and assistance to engage successfully with their studies. This *Framework for All* is not prescriptive in the types of support offered. It focuses on the attitudes and approaches of higher education

providers regarding how they teach, serve and support individual students. It rewrites the current paradigm as revealed through this research and that of Ravindran et al. (2017) in their work on culturally appropriate disability services, who also found that support systems place the Indigenous student as an outsider, needing to navigate confusing and inconsistent systems, accept a label of 'disability' and undergo a process of individually determining eligibility before receiving support.

In their review of university support for Indigenous students with a disability, Fleming and Grace (2016) observed that Indigenous students might feel so 'unsafe' that the only place they feel they can truly relax and be accepted is in dedicated support areas. All areas of our institutions need to be culturally safe and welcoming for Indigenous students with a disability. Their place is everyplace. For this reason, cultural safety has been included in the *Framework for All*. All institutional staff must carry responsibility for ensuring it, not just those who think they will interface with Indigenous students who have a disability. By embedding cultural safety across entire campuses, the current colonisation cycle of imprinting on staff institutional bias and values that exclude and judge may be thwarted. This *Framework for All* promotes fostering the values of love, care and respect for all, thereby rendering all spaces and places within our institutions welcoming and culturally safe.

The *Framework for All* provides a two-way approach to learning and support that will serve Indigenous students with a disability and all students who face multiple disadvantages or barriers such as disability, their cultural perspective of disability, poverty, trauma or sexuality. With the *Framework for All*, the institution ensures that, by putting student needs first, students can approach staff with confidence that they will be respected and supported without being labelled with deficit tags such as 'non-traditional students' (Snowden & Lewis, 2015). Further, the *Framework for All* reaches out to students who may need support but are not presenting to services. The *Framework for All* requires universities to know their Indigenous students with

a disability and care about them as people, serve them and respond flexibly and effectively to scaffold their engagement with their studies. Student wellbeing, happiness and successful transition to the next chapter in their life must be an institutional priority and embed what Yusef Waghid refers to as an 'ethic of care' (2019).

From a sector perspective, Australian universities and higher education providers have misconstrued the removal of entry barriers to courses as equity initiatives. Without providing the supports required by Indigenous students with a disability to engage and succeed fully, institutions have set these students up for failure and reinforced colonising messages of deficiency—the *Framework for All* addresses these institutionalised barriers. Chapter Seven concludes this thesis by drawing on the research findings, and discussing strategies for moving forward with the *Framework for All* to ensure adequate support for Indigenous students with a disability.

Chapter 7: An Opportunity for Change

7.1 Introduction

This research has examined what universities are currently doing concerning supporting Indigenous students with a disability and listened to and learned from the stories of Indigenous people with a disability who have lived experience navigating the Australian higher education sector. The Framework for All forms the response to the core research question:

> How can the higher education sector effectively support Indigenous students with a disability in their engagement with their education and successful transition to employment and opportunity?

It is a decolonising framework that seeks to remove barriers created by the internal policies and procedures implemented by institutions. The whole premise of this framework is respect for and response to the Indigenous perspective on disability. It does not demand change or conformity by the Indigenous students to institutional procedures and policies to receive the same level of assistance received by non-Indigenous students. Within this model, there is no need for Indigenous students to know or declare that they have a disability. They are not required to obtain a diagnosis, carry a label or compete for assistance with other students from the general student cohort. The *Framework for All* is to be implemented by all staff, not just support staff, nor only Indigenous staff.

7.2 Where Are We Now in 2021?

The *Framework for All* provides a support framework for both face-to-face and online teaching and, as such, is a timely initiative for the Australian higher education sector. It is estimated that there are currently over 21,000 Indigenous students and 77,633 students with a disability enrolled in higher education in Australia (DESE, 2020). With COVID19, these 98,633 students, along with all other students, have been required to study from home and use

their technology and study alone. In their global examination of the impact of COVID19 and the pivot to online education on equity groups, Belluigi et al. (2020) identified that those cohorts who faced barriers before the pandemic now experienced exacerbated barriers. Lack of access to technology, caregiving responsibilities, scarcity of resources and crowded and insecure accommodation all laid bare the inequalities in our higher education systems globally. As addressed in this thesis, Indigenous students with a disability are one such cohort. Both Tracks of this study have provided evidence that the sector had not been focusing on equity initiatives associated with online education.

As stated by Blundell et al. (2020), 'the pandemic has highlighted educational inequalities. There is an opportunity here to rethink further education and vocational training' (p. 318). The *Framework for All* has emerged from research seeking to serve the most vulnerable in our higher education sector; however, it will serve all students. It is a framework that calls for a shift in the thinking and culture of our institutions—away from the colonising legacy of places of privilege and opportunity for a selected few and towards a pathway for all to personal enrichment, growth, learning and opportunity. The old system has broken—there is now an opportunity to rebuild an inclusive and effective sector for all.

7.3 Summary of Research Findings and Strategies for Institutions

This research has shown the desire for and benefit of Indigenous students with a disability having supportive relationships with teaching staff who are trained in cultural safety, PS and UDL. When this occurs, Indigenous students with a disability will be engaging in a learning environment where:

- All learning materials and experiences are accessible and, as students, they have a choice in how they access their learning materials.
- Their teaching staff and fellow students have been oriented to ATs and can prompt their use if a student is struggling (e.g., suggesting that students try listening to their

readings if they are having difficulty engaging with the written text, accessing captions and transcriptions for videos and audio material, using programs such as speech-to-text to overcome writing blocks and commence written activities, using programs such as Grammarly to check grammar and provide suggestions with phrasing).

- All staff are strongly committed to cultural safety principles and ensuring that all physical and online environments within the institution are culturally safe and that respect is shown to Indigenous Australia, culture and people as a foundation for all learning activities.
- They are respected as students with a rightful place within the institution, rather than as disadvantaged students—that they belong, and that this is their institution.
- They are secure in the knowledge that, if they request assistance, it will be provided to them.

As depicted in Figure 6.3, the *Framework for All* is based on two-way communication and sharing between the student and teaching and support staff. Power in the relationship and communication rests with the student. The *Framework for All* presents a way to improve institutional culture, communications, community and efficiencies in providing practical support for Indigenous students with a disability. It is a framework designed to enhance student engagement and success.

This framework requires the commitment of all staff to shift to a PC way of thinking—to shift away from colonising ways of thinking that consider both Indigenous student and students with a disability as outsiders to the higher education system. All staff, no matter their role, carry the responsibility of embracing the interests of the student at the centre of all they do. As represented in the *Framework for All*, this PC approach does not imply further work for academics but rather liberates them and the students from the internally created institutional

bureaucracies designed to triage who should get support and who is to remain unsupported. It provides them with the imprimatur to commence a dialogue with their students, build relationships, identify support needs and authorise and action what is needed. With cultural safety and UDL in place, the imposition on teaching staff should be limited. However, it will mean that they must be responsive and flexible to students, treating each as an individual and maintaining their course standards while flexibly accommodating student needs and facilitating engagement and success.

Kilpatrick et al. (2016) noted the annual increase in the percentage of students with a disability enrolling in higher education. In 2013, it was 5.4 per cent; in 2019, this figure had increased to 7.6 per cent of enrolments (DESE, 2020). These growing numbers underscore the need for institutions to reimagine current practice and embrace the principles of UDL in the development, delivery and assessment of curriculum as presented in the *Framework for All.*

Kilpatrick et al. (2016) further noted that 'most institutions indicated that mobility issues have been addressed in terms of accessibility of buildings and facilities' (p. 756); students with physical disabilities were mostly not needing to present for access assistance. Similarly, if the learning and teaching experience, either online or face-to-face, is accessible, students with a sensory or learning disability will mostly not need to seek additional access support. Designing and delivering curriculum in this manner from a human rights and legal perspective enhances the institution's compliance with the laws and conventions set out in Appendix H and the Commonwealth Government's mandatory requirements for departments and agencies that they fund (Australian Government, n.d.).

The *Framework for All*, as applied in the online environment, requires staff to reach out in the same way expected for face-to-face teaching. It requires an institutional culture of care and enquiry regarding barriers that Indigenous students with a disability may be experiencing in their online studies and how to facilitate remedies. In a report on improving student access

to and participation in higher education, Stone (2016) noted findings consistent with the premise of the *Framework for All*, particularly regarding online education and the inclusion of students with a disability. The findings state that:

> A strategic whole of institution (response) is required … include(ing) an institution-wide understanding of the nature and diversity of the online student cohort … collaboration across the institution is required to integrate and embed support; delivering it to students at point of need. (p. 5)

In the national guidelines that emerged from this report, emphasis is placed on teaching staff reaching out to students, creating online communities, ensuring that the online learning environment is accessible and personalising student interventions (Stone, 2016).

The *Framework for All* assumes that all activities and opportunities offered to the general student body will be brought within the framework. Indigenous students with a disability will be included due to the requirement for those activities being designed and developed inclusively. Traineeships, transition to employment programs, work-integrated learning initiatives and mentoring programs will all be culturally safe, PC and designed using UDL principles. To avoid Indigenous students with a disability missing out on employment and transition opportunities, it is critical that those running the programs proactively reach out to all Indigenous students and facilitate their involvement. Similarly, it is vital that, where external groups provide scholarships, opportunities and services, they are also made aware of the requirement to cater to those with an Indigenous perspective on disability. An invitation or direction to participate is not sufficient to mitigate the barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability. This research has demonstrated that an effective response involves reaching out, walking alongside and facilitating involvement with programs, providing proactive support if and as required.

The *Framework for All* can provide healing for the higher education sector. It suggests that the practice of triaging supports for Indigenous students with a disability should be abolished—if supports are requested, they are given. However, if support is not requested and teaching staff identify opportunities to provide support, they are taken. For both the physical and online environment, institutional culture is culturally safe, accessible and PC to build an inclusive community where Indigenous students with a disability can thrive.

7.4 Areas for Further Research

In undertaking this research, several areas were identified as worthy of investigation; however, they were beyond the scope of this initial study. Subsequently, further research is required to identify the specific barriers faced by:

1. **Indigenous students with an intellectual disability**: the incidence of intellectual disability is much higher in Indigenous people than the general population (5.9% compared to 2.5%) (ABS, 2017a). How the higher education sector, through the VET providers, meets the needs of this student cohort is a question that warrants further investigation.
2. **Indigenous students with a disability who are incarcerated**: as of June 2020, 29 per cent of all prisoners in Australia are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, despite comprising only 3.3 per cent of the population. Seventy-nine per cent of all Indigenous prisoners had experienced prior adult imprisonment, with a median age of 32.1 years (ABS, 2020c). Thirty-eight per cent of all prisoners in Australia have a disability (AIHW, 2015). Given the Indigenous perspective on disability, a question that must be asked is: how many of this cohort have a disability and are they provided with opportunities for higher education and transition to life opportunities after serving their sentence?

3. **Indigenous students with a disability studying through private RTOs**: given that there are now over 4,000 private RTOs in Australia and the focus for this research has been primarily on public institutions of higher education, there is an essential question regarding how these private institutions are supporting Indigenous students with a disability.
4. **Indigenous students with a disability transitioning from education to employment**: it was evident from listening to the study participants' stories that this is a significant issue; further research must be conducted in this area to inform policy and practice.
5. **Indigenous students who are dropping out of higher education**: given the Indigenous perspective on disability and the high rate of attrition for Indigenous students generally, further research is required to identify the relationship between attrition and unrecognised, undeclared and unsupported disability.

7.5 Conclusion

This research has produced the *Framework for All* to assist higher education institutions of any size to support Indigenous students with a disability. In the process, it has developed and utilised a methodology and conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1) that non-Indigenous researchers can use to secure answers to their White Questions. This conceptual framework ensures oversight by those with an Indigenous standpoint, as defined by Gilroy (2009a), subordinating all research activities to the cultural safety and human rights of the Indigenous people who will be affected by the research. It provides a way for non-Indigenous researchers to become agents of decolonisation, identifying and remedying exclusion and suppression practices throughout Australian institutional systems.

The *Framework for All* challenges what Stewart (2020) described as the hard-wired roots of inequity in the higher education system. Through its simplicity, the framework offers

institutions the opportunity to be genuinely inclusive of Indigenous students with a disability and, by default, all students with a disability. It requires senior executive and teaching staff to recognise the barriers created by current practice and shift their thinking from expecting students to fit the system to changing the system to suit all students. Again, as stated by Stewart (2020), 'inequity in higher education does not have to remain intransigent. If we care about disrupting and dismantling it, then our determination to do so must go deeper' (p. 16). The impact of COVID19 on the Australian higher education sector has provided the nation with a historical opportunity to stop, examine what we are doing and move forwards with both financial efficiencies and equity for our Indigenous students with a disability—to move away from perpetuating colonising ways and embed a culture of care, PC, cultural safety and access across all facets of the higher education sector.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Human Ethics Approval

APPENDIX A

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
Human Research Ethics Committee

Monday, 17 October 2016

Dr John Gilroy
Health Systems and Global Populations; Faculty of Health Sciences
Email: john.gilroy@sydney.edu.au

Dear John

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application.

After consideration of your response to the comments raised your project has been approved.

Approval is granted for a period of four years from **17 October 2016** to **17 October 2020**

Project title: **White Questions Black Answers: Effective inclusion of Indigenous students with a disability into higher education in Australia**

Project no.: **2016/751**

First Annual Report due: **17 October 2017**

Authorised Personnel: **Gilroy John; Parmenter Trevor; Kerr Sharon; O'Brien Patricia;**

Documents Approved:

Date Uploaded	Version number	Document Name
11/10/2016	Version 3	Amended PIS form as per request
04/10/2016	Version 2	Participant Consent form
12/08/2016	Version 1	Interview and focus group questions and script
26/07/2016	Version 1	Terms of reference of Indigenous advisory group

Condition/s of Approval

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.
- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
  - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
  - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).
- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.

Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
Level 2, Margaret Telfer Building (K07)
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

T +61 2 9036 9161
E human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
W sydney.edu.au/ethics

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Faculty Research Group: Disability and Community
Faculty of Health Sciences

ABN 15 211 513 464

Chief Investigator:
Dr John Gilroy, ARC Research Fellow, Faculty of Health Sciences University of Sydney.

Ejohn.gilroy@sydney.edu.au

White Questions Black Answers: Effective inclusion of Indigenous Australians with a disability into higher education

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Hi my name is Sharon Kerr and I am a PhD student at Sydney University. I have been working in education for most of my life and in the area of advocacy for people with a disability and Indigenous students with a disability for about the last 10 years. It would be great if you could take part in this research that is forming part of my PhD. Along with my supervisors and Indigenous advisory group (Roslyn Sackley, Maria Robinson and Naomi Carolin), we are trying to find out how universities and TAFE's can best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with a disability.

It is important that we hear the stories of people who have experienced the current systems and that is why want to hear about your experiences with TAFE's and Universities and listen to your ideas about how Indigenous students can be better served.

The idea of this information sheet is to tell you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. It is totally ok for you to say that you don't want to be involved. Or even change your mind once we have started.

Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that I haven't explained well or you want to know more about.

By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ Understand that it is totally ok for you to withdraw at any time.

(1) Who is running the study?

I am a Phd student with Sydney University and the following academics are my supervisors.

- Professor Trevor Parmenter, Emeritus Professor, Sydney University
- Dr John Gilroy, Lecturer, Sydney University
- Professor Patricia O'Brien, Sydney University

Trevor, Patricia and John have extensive experience with disability. John is also an Aboriginal researcher and is currently doing research based out of Alice Springs. For my study John is listed as the Chief Investigator, so it is ok to contact him to ask questions as well.

(2) What will the study involve for me?

You will be asked to participate in either a 40-minute individual chat or a one-hour focus group with others. If you prefer to have an individual chat, we will work out a time and place that suits you. If I can't physically get to you, we will make some other arrangements using phone conferencing or Skype.

Unless you request otherwise, I will be recording our discussions. I am needing to do this so that I can type up a transcript afterwards. When I type it up I will also change names and locations etc., so that no one will be able to trace what has been said back to you. This is of course unless you would like your story to be preserved and used with your name so that people know that it was your thoughts and ideas that were included in the research. As soon as I have finished

typing up the audio , I will give it to you in the format that you prefer so that you can check what I have typed for accuracy. After that I will delete the audio file.

If you have questions at any time about the study or you want to withdraw, you are invited to contact me directly on 0487104391 or email sker2923@uni.sydney.edu.au

If you withdraw you will be provided with a confirmation in the format of your preference.

(3) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

(4) Will I be told the results of the study?

Sure, just ask me to keep you informed of the results and I will send you out a newsletter when the results are through.

(5) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

This research was reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) prior to me starting this research. The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney 2016/751. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).* This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

- **Telephone:** +61 2 8627 8176
- **Email:** ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au
- **Fax:** +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

Remember: It is totally ok for you to withdraw from this research at anytime. You will not be offending anyone or causing any problems.

Thank you so much for thinking about participating in this research. Sharon

This sheet is yours to keep.

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Faculty Research Group: Disability and Community
Faculty of Health Sciences

ABN 15 211 513 464

Chief Investigator:
Dr John Gilroy, ARC Research Fellow, Faculty of Health Sciences University of Sydney.

Ejohn.gilroy@sydney.edu.au

White Questions Black Answers: Effective inclusion of Indigenous Australians with a disability into higher education

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- ✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- ✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- ✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- ✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney now or in the future.
- ✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- ✓ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided

will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

✓ I understand that I may leave the focus group at any time if I do not wish to continue. I also understand that it will not be possible to withdraw my comments once the group has started as it is a group discussion.

✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me unless I consent to being identified using the "Yes" checkbox below.

☐ Yes, I am happy to be identified.

☐ No, I don't want to be identified. Please keep my identity anonymous.

N.B Unless requested otherwise, all material will be de-identified.

I consent to the researchers:

- **Making an audio-recording** YES ☐ NO ☐
- **Reviewing transcripts of the recording** YES ☐ NO ☐

I also consent to being contacted at a later date if necessary for clarification of what I have said.

YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ **NO** ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

_____

☐ Email: _____

.....

Signature

…… ……

PRINT name

……

Date

Appendix D: Terms of Reference of Indigenous Advisory Group

Terms of Reference for: Indigenous Advisory Group for research being conducted by Sharon Ker Ph.D candidate of Sydney University.

1.Role/Purpose

This group has been formed as part of the process of ensuring that the research is community led.
The role of this group is to walk alongside the Ph.D candidate as the research is conducted to ensure that the research is done in a manner that:

1. serves the purposes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
2. is conducted in a manner that is culturally safe and respectful of Indigenous ways of doing and knowing
3. appropriately acknowledges Indigenous knowledges and communicates findings effectively back to communities

2.Term

The first official meeting of the Indigenous Advisory group will take place at 8:30pm on the 2nd June 2015. Final submission of the thesis is due on the 1st of March 2018 and will signal the official commitment to this group.

3.Membership

The Advisory group will comprise:
Roslyn Sackley
Maria Robinson
Naomi Carolin

4.Roles and Responsibilities

This advisory group consists of respected community members with expertise, understanding and background in the challenges faced by Indigenous students with a disability undertaking higher education. Higher education for the purpose of this research will include all post secondary education (i.e. TAFE and University)
All members of the advisory group undertake a commitment to ensuring that Sharon Kerr is provided with appropriate guidance and support as she undertakes research at Sydney University and to speak openly regarding suggestions or concerns.
Academic supervision of this research is the responsibility of Professor Emeritus Trevor Parmenter and Dr John Gilroy. If at any time the group is concerned about any of the research activities being undertaken by Sharon Kerr and believe that she is not responding to guidance with regard to issues listed under *Role/Purpose* of these terms of reference, they undertake to bring these concerns to the attention of her Academic Supervisors whose contact details are as follows:

Dr John Gilroy
Phone: 9351 9408
Email: john.gilroy@sydney.edu.au
Professor Emeritus Trevor Parmenter
Phone: 0419 408 808
trevor.parmenter@sydney.edu.au

5.Acknowledgement of contribution

The contribution of the advisory group will be acknowledged in all publications and presentations relating to this research made by Sharon Kerr in the manner preferred by each member of the group.
If members of the advisory group desire to be co-authors on any papers or hold any additional roles for this research such as cultural broker etc, then it is important that this is negotiated separately from these terms of reference.

6.Confidentiality

In your role as a member of the advisory group, you undertake not to disclose any information relating to participants that may have been inadvertently mentioned or disclosed during meetings. Furthermore you understand that findings of the research need to be reported back to the community via the official processes of the University of Sydney.

7.Meetings.

All meetings will be chaired by Sharon Kerr. A meeting quorum will be 2 members of the advisory group in addition to Sharon Kerr.
Meeting agendas and minutes will be provided by Sharon Kerr PhD candidate Sydney University.
Meetings will be held on a bimonthly basis for 1 hour through phone or Skype meetings.

8.Amendment, Modification or Variation

These terms of reference may be amended, varied or modified in writing after consultation and agreement by the Advisory Group members.

Appendix E: Audit Tool

SHARON KERR
http://sydney.edu.au/|PhD Candidate,
Centre for Disability Research and Policy,
Faculty of Health Sciences

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
75 East Street | Lidcombe | NSW | 2141
T +61 2 93519139
E sker2923@uni.sydney.edu.au |
W http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/cdrp/
CRICOS 00026A

Website Audit Tool

This tool was developed by Sharon Kerr PhD candidate, Centre for Disability Research and Policy, Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney, for the purpose of collecting data analyzing official university communications available on public websites as part of the research project : "White Questions Black Answers: Effective inclusion of Indigenous students with a disability into higher education.
6th May, 2016.

Name of University:

Website address:

Date accessed:

Accessed by:

2. **Was there information about disability support services?**

   Yes ☐ **No** ☐

   General Comments:

3. **Did the disability support services page indicate support services available to Indigenous students?**

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

General Comments:

4. **Was there information on the disability services website regarding the availability of Indigenous staff for students to contact?**

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

General Comments:

5. **Was there information about Indigenous support services?**

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

General Comments:

6. **Did the Indigenous support services indicate support available for students with a disability?**

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

General Comments:

7. **Was there information about any of the following additional supports available for Indigenous students?**

Mentoring Programs **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Counseling and support **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

[Male and Female counselors available] **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Internships and work experience programs **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Assistive technologies **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Remedial and preparatory courses **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐Tutoring

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

Supportive spaces for Indigenous students **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Assistance with housing **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Assistance with finances **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Other

General Comments:

8. **Could Indigenous students present directly for help or were they required to obtain documentation from others prior to receiving assistance? (eg Required to get form filled out by Doctor verifying their need.)**

   Yes ☐ **No** ☐

   General Comments:

9. **Did the university website's design, imagery and content reflect a welcoming message to Indigenous students. Eg.Use of Photos of Indigenous students studying; Aboriginal flag, use of colours.**

   Yes ☐ **No** ☐

   General Comments:

10. **Did the university website's design, imagery and content reflect a welcoming message to other cohorts of students Eg refugees, international ?**

    Yes ☐ **No** ☐

    If yes what cohorts of students were being targetted:

11. **Was there clear information on the website as to who Indigenous students should contact if they required assistance?**

    Yes ☐ **No** ☐

General Comments:

12. **From the front page of the website how many clicks did it take to get to information about support for Indigenous students?**

    Number of clicks:

    General Comments:

13. **From the front page of the website how many clicks did it take to get to information about support for students with a disability?**

    Number of clicks:

    General Comments:

Appendix F: Commonalities between Quantitative and Qualitative Tracks

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
Barriers experienced because of the institutions' variable and bureaucratic processes in providing needed assistance	**Variable Service delivery** -Participants indicated that the service and support that they received was variable from institution to institution and also within institutions as to whom they were interfacing with. -Variability of support often came down.to the willingness of individual lecturers offering support	**Analysis of audit findings revealed that there was a great deal of variability across universities** relating to types of supports and services provided to Indigenous students generally and by implication to Indigenous students with a disability who present to the Indigenous student support unit or the disability support unit. **Only seven (17.5%) universities provided the opportunity for Indigenous students with a disability to present directly for help without supporting documentation**. Thirty-three (82.5%) universities required students to provide documentation from a specialist medical or allied health practitioner prior to the process for support being able to commence**. One (2.5%) university noted a ten-step process for all students to proceed through to receive a Learning Action Plan (LAP), noting that once it lapsed, a new LAP would need to be applied for and secured prior to further assistance being given**. One university also noted the need for students to have documentary evidence of their Aboriginality.

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	Lack of clarity of where to go for help -All five participants indicated a lack of clarity of where to go for help	-Thirty five (87.5%) universities had clear contact details for Indigenous students by way of a department phone number or email address of who they should contact if they needed assistance, of these 35 universities **only one (2.5%) provided full names, roles and contact details of the Indigenous staff to contact.** **-Only seven (17.5%) of Indigenous support units indicating support available for students with a disability on their Indigenous support services page**. An Indigenous student with an unidentified or unrecognised disability, who directly accesses Indigenous student support services in 39 (81.5%) of the 38 universities that did offer Indigenous services would be accessing a service that is not linked with mainstream disability services. For a student who chooses the disability support unit as their pathway for support the results would suggest that they would not be able to be provided with disability support from an Indigenous staff member, with none (0%) of the forty universities indicating this service. Further, as only five (12.5%)

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
		of the 40 universities indicated a link through from the disability support to Indigenous support, in 35 (87.5%) of universities, they would be at risk of not being linked up with any of the services available to Indigenous students.
	Indigenous academics not in contact with disability support services -All five participants were undertaking studies with Indigenous academics who were evidently not in any contact with the disability support unit or aware of supports available.)	Little by way of technical support was offered to Indigenous students, with only one (2.5%) university providing computers for personal use and no (0%) universities offering assistive technologies such as text to speech or speech to text. Assistive technologies assist students who have difficulty engaging with written text.
	Not presenting to disability support units -Only two of the participants actively sought support from the disability support units approach disability support units for assistance reported that the variable levels of support they did receive were dependent on who they saw and that they often did not	

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	receive their adapted learning materials in a timely fashion) **Indigenous units not seen as an avenue for support – but rather for courses with Indigenous focus.** (participants did not see the Indigenous support units within their respective universities as places to go to secure assistance) **Accessible learning materials** (Participants identified lack of funding as a reason for non-provision of accessible learning materials. Staff were reported as making it clear what students could expect)	
Barriers that were due to having a disability	**Indigenous perspective of disability** Participants shared experiences of Indigenous staff not having an understanding of their disability access needs and disability more generally.	Thirty-three universities (82.5%) did not indicate support available for students with a disability on their Indigenous support services page.

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	In addressing reasons why three of the participants did not seek support from the disability support services, it was clear that their attitudes towards disability created a barrier to them reaching out for assistance Lack of understanding of disability compounded when Indigenous staff did not allow any flexibility for students to meet course requirements **Lack of flexibility** The impact of flexibility of individual staff proved to be a common thread through all themes. Students reported both positive and negative experiences associated with staff flexibility concerning their access and personal needs	
Barriers associated with Indigeneity	**Social, economic, health and internal barriers** Participants on approaching the disability support unit for assistance expressed frustration at the lack of understanding from staff as to the challenges that they faced arising from their Indigeneity.	• childcare provided by Indigenous childcare workers (1, 2.5%), Assistance with finances 34 (85%)

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	There were the additional challenges faced by participants who because of their Indigeneity and barriers that they had struggled with their entire lives left them with - Poor health and ongoing medical conditions - Limited personal expectations. - Financial hardship and carer responsibilities **Indigenous students being forced to travel a long way to undertake courses.** Two of the participants raised the practice of having only a few select TAFEs offer courses based on Indigenous knowledge as a systemic barrier for Indigenous students with a disability. **Break down in communications** Participants indicated their own hesitation and that of their Indigenous peers in coming forward and speaking with non-Indigenous counsellors and support staff,	Mentoring programs 21 (52.5%) Remedial and preparatory courses **24 (60%)** Assistance with housing 11 (27.5%) Away from base programs 1 (2.5%) Block release programs 1 (2.5%) Supportive spaces for Indigenous students 34 (85%) Counselling and support available in 14 (35%) of universities Indigenous Male and female counsellors available 0 (0%) Indigenous support officer with every faculty 1 (2.5%) Relationship manager 1 (2.5%)

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	Indigenous students not knowing what they didn't know and staff assuming that they knew course requirements and administrative processes was also an issue.	Academic and administrative support 35 (87.5%)
Importance of positive relationships	**Importance of respect** Participants expressed pride in both their families and communities Participants expressed appreciation where respect was afforded to them regardless of the staff member being Indigenous or not. There was appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff. Acts of kindness were remembered when staff had strived to help overcome the barriers associated with disability and to enhance understanding. When participants were met with caring and supportive attitudes, these were recognised and cherished Frustration was experienced arising from a lack of respect and understanding of what participants were going	Thirty-four (85%) university websites had imagery and content reflecting a welcoming message to Indigenous students. Of these 34 (85%) universities, 27 (79%) universities had this imagery limited to pages on the website specifically addressing Indigenous students or an acknowledgement of country. Only one university (2.5%) had the picture of an Aboriginal teacher on the front page of the website assisting a group of students. Both private universities had no Indigenous imagery or acknowledgement of country.

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	through and the obstacles that they were experiencing in their personal life **Importance of care and trust** **Students not knowing where to go for assistance was mentioned**, further to this was the shared experience of three of the participants that indicated a lack of caring or connection from the staff when they were at the point of dropping out The attitude of staff towards the participants had a big impact on their self confidence The issue of relationships and poor communications in the online environment was mentioned by participants in the context of communications with teaching and support staff - lack of community and sense of social isolation from fellow students	Information on the websites for support Indigenous students was difficult to locate in 22 (58%) of the 38 universities Information on the websites for support for students with a disability was difficult to locate in 35 (87.5%) of the 40 universities.
A spirit of resilience, determination and desire to succeed	**Determined to succeed** All five participants in this study undertook multiple attempts at studying in the higher education sector demonstrating resilience,	

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	determination and a desire to succeed For some it proved to introduce generational change to their families Where repeated attempts had been made to engage with higher education and failure was experienced, participants expressed feelings of regret of dreams never realised **Work experience and transition to work** For a number of the participants their continual attempts at Higher Education were spurred on by lack of success in securing employment This frustration of efforts to secure employment was experienced by participants who had excelled academically, leaving them to interpret their lack of success as discrimination The responsibility for their inability to utilise their education as a tool to close the gap on their own life opportunities and provide economic security for themselves and their families was placed with the	Initiatives to support employment while studying offered by 1 (2.5%) of the 40 universities.

Themes of Qualitative Track	Sub-themes and findings from analysis of Qualitative Track	Mapping with the findings and analysis of Quantitative Track
	institutions where they were studying None of the participants reported experiences with Disability Employment Services (DES) or advice or awareness of the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) program	

Appendix G: Mapping the Themes

Table

Themes in the Words of the Participants and as Interpreted by the Researcher resulting in the Consolidated Themes Components and the five umbrella themes for analysis (Theme No for Analysis).

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
1	"we only have the funding to help you in class, we can't come and help you with research"…	Support being triaged and delivered to a formula or policy, not to the individual needs of the student.	CT 1: Support received variable both between and within organisations.	T2
1	I actually had to leave uni and just let it go because I couldn't cope with how hard it was, getting my course material given to me at the end of semester which created a lot of problems.	Students with sensory disabilities not receiving materials in the format they require in a timely fashion to enable engagement.	CT 2: Adequate assistance not being given to access learning materials in an accessible format or through the use of assistive technologies. CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	T2
1	…and it just depended on who you knew and who would be really helpful in providing support.	Support being variable within an organisation.	CT 1: Support received variable both between and within organisations.	T1
1	… the lecturer was not flexible and actually complained that I was behind in submitting my assignment and he reported me to the Aboriginal unit …	Lack of flexibility from teaching staff and culturally unsafe attitudes.	CT 3: Lack of flexibility by the teaching staff and/or administration. CT 4: Culturally unsafe attitudes of the staff or institution. CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes.	T2 T3 T3

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
1	…but some of the other courses I got a distinction and a high distinction, so it really, really showed me how well I could do when I had the support.	Indigenous students with a disability experience academic success when given appropriate support.	CT 5: Students experiencing success when given appropriate support	T5
1	… they would take you and look after you… and they weren't going to let you just leave and say "I can't do it" ... they wanted everybody to feel looked after.	Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff.	CT 6: Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous)	T4
1	…I stopped that year because of health issues and then I was working part time.	Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability, leading to non-completion of studies.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability. CT 13: Impact of limited expectations. CT 14: Lack of transition to employment	T3
1	So, I could see when I was getting the right support that I did quite well and the teachers were supportive of me because they knew I had the ability…	Indigenous students with a disability experience academic success when given appropriate support.	CT 5: Students experiencing success when given appropriate support. CT 12: Resilience of Indigenous students with a disability to keep studying in spite of barriers and a keen desire to learn.	T5
1	… but then when it comes to uploading or doing exams online ... that's when it becomes difficult	Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when courses are online.	CT 8: Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when	T2 T3

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
			courses are online or out of area.	
1	I think … I just paid off my HECS debt last year	Burden of Government debt accrued by Indigenous students with a disability for courses that they did not complete.	CT 9: Future quality of life impacted by non-completion of studies.	T5
1	… if I had finished my degrees, I probably would have had more of a chance … I wouldn't just be another administration officer …	Life opportunities for Indigenous students with a disability impacted by their non-completion of higher education studies.	CT 9: Future quality of life impacted by non-completion of studies.	T5
1	…I think a lot of us Aboriginal people ... and I have seen it with other people … have had to give up because they support family as carers or family and kinship become number one and I have seen it with other students…	Impact of carer responsibilities on successful completion of higher education studies.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	T3
1	…. I think a lot of people don't realise they have special needs because you don't have to have a physical disability to have a disability…	Impact of undiagnosed, unrecognised disability for Indigenous students more broadly engaging successfully with higher education studies.	CT 11: Indigenous cultural perspective of disability.	T3
2	… like I did three steps in assignments. First, I thought about what I had to write then I'd have to do it in Braille, then I'd have to record it or type it. You know	Indigenous students with a disability striving to overcome barriers caused by their disability to complete the same tasks as other students. (Lack of	CT 2: Adequate assistance not being given to access learning materials in an accessible format or through the use of assistive technologies.	T2

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
	… so I had those three stages doing assignments.	flexibility in curriculum design, delivery and assessment.)		
2	…but I do remember those days and really, really interesting things like I mean … this lecturer brought in a fish for me to feel. I can't remember the context, but I thought you know they really tried to make it really practical…	Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff.	CT 6: Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous)	T4
2	I always loved to study, I always wanted to be a teacher that was what I always wanted to be even when I was tiny…	Indigenous students with a disability highly motivated to undertake higher education.	CT 12: Resilience of Indigenous students with a disability to keep studying in spite of barriers and a keen desire to learn. CT 14: Lack of transition to employment	T5
2	…there were courses that I didn't end up doing because the lecturers didn't let me make recordings…	Lack of flexibility from teaching staff.	CT 1: Support received variable both between and within organisations. CT 2: Adequate assistance not being given to access learning materials in an accessible format or through the use of assistive technologies.	T2
2	.... I don't even remember meeting Aboriginal people at all at that stage…	Indigenous students with a disability not linked in with other Indigenous students.	CT 11: Indigenous cultural perspective of disability.	T2 T3

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
2	…I had a whole lot of death in my family and with very close friends…	Indigenous students with a disability impacted by the poor health profiles and increased morbidity rates within Indigenous communities.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	T3
2	…but I wasn't catching up, I tried really hard to catch up with what I was doing and I repeated and repeated, but I couldn't get through. I found it very, very, difficult to communicate with the academics ...	Breakdown in communication with academics and higher education support services.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability. CT 8: Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when courses are online or out of area.	T4
2	…it was Indigenous academics convening this course, and I was so disappointed with their attitude… there was no consideration for disability ... for my circumstances…	Indigenous staff not having disability awareness.	CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes. CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	T2 T3
2	I don't think they had any idea of disability awareness… and that's disappointing, because it's all around you in community … in their communities as well.	Indigenous staff not having disability awareness.	CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes.	T2 T3
2	They suggested that I had to go ... find the newspapers that these deaths were in and present them as evidence. Find the newspapers with the death notices	Abelist and culturally unsafe internal policies and procedures of institutions creating barriers	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	T2 T3

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
	[of family] … and that kind of stuff … said that they needed evidence ...	for Indigenous students with a disability.	CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes.	
2	... but when I was actually doing it for one of the other academics ... they did accept an audio… that was the only course I passed…	Lack of flexibility from teaching staff… or conversely the positive impact when they are flexible.	CT 1: Support received variable both between and within organisations. CT 2: Adequate assistance not being given to access learning materials in an accessible format or through the use of assistive technologies. CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes.	T2
2	…I think that there was some isolation between students … I felt that there was no community…	Indigenous students with a disability not linked in with other Indigenous students.	CT 11: Indigenous cultural perspective of disability.	T2 T3
3	…so put it this way I was sick 3 times that year and that really disrupted my studies…	Impact of health issues.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	T3
3	... there were some subjects that were a bit hard at times … the cultural part wasn't too hard for me, but the law part was, ... specially with jargons and words. ..	Barriers caused through the language used in course delivery that could be mitigated with universal design principles.	CT 2: Adequate assistance not being given to access learning materials in an accessible format or through the use of assistive technologies.	T2

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
3	…like anyone that's got a vision impairment like that, I do require large print to read articles…	Need for alternative formats or assistive technologies to access learning materials.	CT 2: Adequate assistance not being given to access learning materials in an accessible format or through the use of assistive technologies.	T2
3	… he was a good teacher too in his own way because even though he was a white fella, he understood our Aboriginal ways and was respectful	Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff.	CT 6: Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous)	T4
3	…there should be the flexibility for disabled students to be able to choose the course in their own area rather than travel so far away …	Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when courses based on Indigenous knowledges are not offered locally.	CT 1: Support received variable both between and within organisations. CT 8: Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when courses are online or out of area.	T2 T3
3	…I used my magnifying glass and that helped me through …	Indigenous students with a disability either not aware of or insisting on their legal entitlement to alternative formats… not asking for help.	CT 2: Adequate assistance not being given to access learning materials in an accessible format or through the use of assistive technologies. CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes. CT 11: Indigenous cultural perspective of disability.	T1 T2 T3

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
			CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	
3	…but they need to know their limits, what they can and can't do … nup uni's not for me…	Impact of limited expectations.	CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	T1 T3
4	…they knew that I had a bit of a disability but it didn't stop me from doing my studies…	Not wanting to focus on personal disability. Minimising personal disability.	CT 11: Indigenous cultural perspective of disability.	T2 T3
4	… I know other students needed more help than what I would have needed.	*nting to focus on personal disability. Minimising personal disability.*	*Indigenous cultural perspective of disability.*	*T3*
4	… Aboriginal people would feel more comfortable talking to their own kind …	Value of having Indigenous staff providing support.	CT 15: Importance of cultural safety.	T4
4	Yeah, well I'm proud of my family. Proud of my culture. Proud of my parents and my upbringing… I have 5 children and they all have had a good education…	Pride in identity and importance of family and culture and value of education.	CT 15: Importance of cultural safety.	T4
4	…One [tutor] was Italian, but he mixed well with Aboriginal people and was just like one of the family …	Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff.	CT 6: Appreciation for and effectiveness of, positive caring attitudes of staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous)	T4
4	…You get a letter back, you know, saying "thanks for your application".	Lack of transition from higher education to employment.	CT 14: Lack of transition to employment	T5
4	I only finished my studies last year and I went back to mainstream… but it is a long way to travel from where I live.	Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when courses based	CT 8: Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when	T2 T3

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
		on Indigenous knowledges are not offered locally.	courses are online or out of area. CT 12: Resilience of Indigenous students with a disability to keep studying in spite of barriers and a keen desire to learn.	
5	…my father passed away in the second year of a Diploma in Information technology business systems, um I started to get depression quite bad...	Indigenous students with a disability impacted by the poor health profiles and increased morbidity rates within Indigenous communities.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	T3
5	... Growing up on a farm, I was never told that I could be a scientist or a mathematician or anything like that…	Impact of limited expectations.	CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	T3
5	..one of the teachers … suggested that I go to uni but trouble was I was still facing depression and supporting young daughters and no money and…it just wasn't really possible…	Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	T3
5	…I went into the second Diploma because I couldn't get work …	Lack of transition from higher education to employment.	CT 12: Resilience of Indigenous students with a disability to keep studying in spite of barriers and a keen desire to learn. CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	T5
5	Not really … other than just fellow students …[no additional help] … I	Not accessing support from Disability services.	CT 11: Indigenous cultural perspective of disability.	T1

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
	would sometimes get them to carry my bag for me …		CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	
5	I also got a TAFE NSW medal, for the highest average mark across the State … yet I couldn't even get an interview for a one month temporary position … being Aboriginal … being overweight … being old …being…	- Indigenous students with a disability experience academic success when given appropriate support. - Lack of transition from higher education to employment. - Impact of discrimination.	CT 12: Resilience of Indigenous students with a disability to keep studying in spite of barriers and a keen desire to learn. CT 14: Lack of transition to employment	T5
5	I was out of breath , keeping up with them, and then afterwards, my knees swolle up…	Impact of health issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	CT 7: Impact of health and economic issues for Indigenous students with a disability.	T3
5	…so I was getting disability discrimination from the Aboriginal support unit.	Indigenous staff not having disability awareness.	CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes.	T2
5	… I would have to arrange my own placement in the schools to do things like classroom observation… so the lecturers actually assumed that everyone was working in a school all the time and had access to what they needed to ... and so if you weren't in that boat, then tough luck!	Assumptions made about individual student's capacity to navigate systems.	CT 8: Additional barriers experienced by Indigenous students with a disability when courses are online or out of area. CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes.	T5

Interview Number	Theme in the words of the participant	Theme as interpreted by the researcher	Consolidated theme component(CT) for analysis	Theme No for Analysis
5	“Aren’t your disabilities a bit much for you being able to teach anyway?”… You know I mean ... you’ve got your course co-ordinator planting seeds of failure in your mind …	Impact of limited expectations.	CT10: Indigenous students with a disability disadvantaged by ableist attitudes. CT 13: Impact of limited expectations.	T5
5	Oh I think it would be nice if the TAFE’s could find some, you know, work placement for some of the students when they are coming up to finishing their TAFE course to actually help them get into the workforce. Not just their favourite students or particularly the white ones that live in the right address, but all students.	Lack of transition from higher education to employment.	CT 14: Lack of transition to employment.	T5
5	I have a lot of history in this town too because my great grandmother was taken from the riverbank and made to be a maid for Major Innes who was in charge of the penal colony here.	Pride in identity and importance of history and culture .	CT 15: Importance of cultural safety.	T4

Appendix H: Conventions and Legislation

International conventions and Australian laws that reflect the right of all to access Higher education.

Global conventions and Australian legislation that dictates access to Higher education as a human and legal right.	**Wording of the convention or legislation**
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966	2(c) "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education" ("OHCHR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights", 2020)
Universal declaration of Human Rights 1948	Article 26(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. ("Universal Declaration of Human Rights", 1948)
UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education (Ratified by Australia in 1966) – Cornerstone of 2030 Agenda	Article 4 (a) … make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity ("UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education", 1960).
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979	Part III Article 10 (a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training ("OHCHR | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", 1979).

Global conventions and Australian legislation that dictates access to Higher education as a human and legal right.	**Wording of the convention or legislation**
UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006	Article 24 (5) 5. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities ("Article 24 - Education | United Nations Enable", 2006).
Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Australian Commonwealth Government)	Section 22 (2A) It is unlawful for an education provider to discriminate against a person on the ground of the person's disability: (a) by developing curricula or training courses having a content that will either exclude the person from participation, or subject the person to any other detriment; or (b) by accrediting curricula or training courses having such a content. (*Disability Discrimination Act*, 1992)
2005 Education Standards accompanying the Disability Discrimination Act 1992	Part 6 6.2 (1) The education provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that the course or program is designed in such a way that the student is, or any student with a disability is, able to participate in the learning experiences (including the assessment and certification requirements) of the course or program, and any relevant supplementary course or program, on the same basis as a student without a disability, and without experiencing discrimination. (b) …in the light of that consultation, decide whether an adjustment is necessary to ensure that

Global conventions and Australian legislation that dictates access to Higher education as a human and legal right.	**Wording of the convention or legislation**
	the student is able to participate in those learning experiences on the same basis as a student without a disability who is enrolled in the course or program;