

### Like a kangaroo watching...

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**A paper advocating the *Embracing of Black Complexity within current Schooling Systems* described as "White Chaos".**

2006 International Conference of the Australasian Evaluation Society Inc.

#### **Introduction**

This paper is still evolving. The contents of such have been evolving since the early white arrivals upon this continent when different cultures and people intersected. The story repeats itself everyday throughout the nation, in schools where there are interracial divides. It plays out daily in a place we call "school" in a small community in Queensland, Australia.

This is not an academic treatise for some prestigious western journal of specialized, stylistic formats and educational writing. It is primarily written to tell you a true story, with my reflections and perspectives about a situation that cries out for attention. The paper links the situation in the evaluative data to mindsets of white systems and offers a theoretical and practical new systems framework for change.

The journey I describe is a human tragedy happening silently before our eyes; a travesty of educational injustice and a problem that sits upon all our educational consciences. It is a story that manifests for you through a sad witnessing of pictures of educational chaos.

There is an irony here. All I have written below in this story, all the commentary of community, have reached decision making ears, white ears, in differing media and through different personnel. It is really a story that is not new. It is in the backwash of people's minds. But, still no-one moves. Nothing happens.

This situation in Indigenous schools is already known by local, state and federal politicians, decision makers, directors, deputy directors, assistant directors, principal officers- whatever their titles and positions of institutional authority. There are high ranking officers, public servants, principals and other teachers who know about Indigenous failures and who are doing some work upon the issues- but no sustainable change and sustainable results seem to be appearing in a consistently recurring, regular manner and in some places no action occurs at all.

Is it that administrators and politicians prefer to turn a blind eye, then rationalise that they are doing "something", or look for some scapegoat, or use for their benefit a stereotypical, sensational, news flash media event? Often people in high places seem to address problems and change in order to stay the same; or do they do things in order to try to generate spin-off, so-called credibility and publicity for themselves? There are many others who try and do great works. But why the continuing failures?

Black Australians will not be lied to without knowing what is happening for real. Indigenous

Australians are the best crap detectors I have known; after all they have had 236 years and much more to fine-tune their skills. Many people around the country are engaged with Indigenous schooling and doing excellent initiatives to try to make a difference. I honour and praise such personnel. But there is so much yet to be done. We are only at the tail-end of the spear. And, in an age of public accountability, political and administrative accountability in education, no-one is really holding themselves personally responsible or holding others accountable for the failure of Indigenous literacy and numeracy. We allow failure to continue. Who can we hold accountable for this? The premiers of the States? The prime minister? The parliaments of the land? The public servants? Teachers? Principals? District and regional officers?

This is a cry from the outback for public accountability to demonstrate what we are doing to be successful for these children. The paper asserts from a naturalistic, illuminative analysis of the data that administrative, leadership and educational mindsets are the current obstacles to successful Indigenous learning improvement and change.

It is time someone blew the public whistle in this playground. But in blowing this public whistle I am not playing the catcher in the long grass -or firing rockets across the skies- I am not interested in blame of individuals although obviously they will realise who they are: I am calling it as it has been heard by me from black voices. I am asking for white systemic reflection and strong remedial action for the benefit of kids- not any individual scapegoating, or systemic cleansing or rhetoric; or backlash upon staff and community as so often occurs in these situations, but true actions to do the job well. And I will continue to watch and speak out on this issue. It is time for courage for the sake of our kids.

Up to now some have described the total experience of educational underachievement of Indigenous kids as close to educational genocide. Whilst I stop short of this claim, the situation does have repercussions and consequences that ruins futures and potential positive changes for many kids and their societal groups. I am sure the people who have suffered this denial of educational justice would probably agree with the notion of educational genocide. There are elements of colonialism, imperialism and even genocidal similarity when one examines the characteristics and proportions of failure and cultural and economic malaise for the Indigenous people of Australia. One word describes the situation: Shame!

Within this urgent contextual mess this is one school site's organizational change evaluation story. To be constructive within this malaise, as an educator I offer suggestions to move forwards from an interpretation of the data, taking an organizational systems of complexity perspective.

This data is still "alive", touchy, politically and personally sensitive; like a sore on a human hand, engendered and needy of some appropriate medical attention. The paper attempts to evaluate the complexity that is black society within white systems of governance in Australia today. It is written by myself as a proud black Australian educator; so, it is from a black perspective and unapologetically advocates the voices of members of this community.

The paper investigates this nationally significant issue, but importantly maintains anonymity; it is an anonymous school for the purposes of this discussion. There are often political realities and management by fear in such circumstances, to keep the lid on situations. We have all seen this transpiring in various institutional scenarios. Anonymity (or as much as humanly possible) is important in such a study because of potential systemic backlashes that will occur to careers and jobs of people for speaking up and out about the situation. Thus by writing this paper for such an evaluative clientele from Australasia I will not endear myself to some bureaucrats in education departments and some principals. I will probably not endear myself to people who pay my educational consultancy salaries; but it is truth and comment from the hearts and minds of a microcosm of black Australia. For that reason it is more important than jobs and careers and

power- it is about future success for our kids. Therefore, the paper must be written because these black voices must be heard.

This investigation occurs into the perceptions of people in the aftermath of the high recent achievements of a particular school under a charismatic black leadership and active team of white and black teachers and Indigenous paraprofessionals. It looks at the aftermath of the moving on of this principal's term and the advent of new governance structures. It listens to voices about contemporary struggles of the community members, to sustain the progress gained within old world, mindset constraints; and powerful, almost hidden assumptions, values and dynamics of structural authoritarian white bureaucracy.

The paper makes inferences due to the data that transpire about white mindsets upon the lives of black kids, their achievement levels, their futures. The paper draws broad issues from these responses applying them to other high proportion enrolments of black students in school sites which I have visited over the last 30 years.

I am aware that this particular case study is not transferable necessarily to other sites; but, I see similarities to many other sites as I travel Australia-wide, and talk daily with other black and white Australian educators, particularly highly esteemed often white, and some black principals and community elders in successful black community schools. Systems have to ensure good teachers go to these areas; the principals are carefully selected; curriculum is culturally appropriate; academic learning is paramount; incentives and resources are provided and much infrastructural support, for example, in terms of technology, transport, socio-economic and health networks are provided. Systems and the decision makers need to be accountable for the educational futures of these children. But, even with these support systems in place, supposing they are positive and constructively operating, it is suggested in this article, from the data, that mindsets of some powerful white administrators are, as it has been historically, an essential stumbling block for change.

Whilst systems are needed for the above support to communities and the giving of certainty, they can cause uncertainty. Whilst systems offer needed organisational processes and secure, habitual tribal rituals, that are appreciated by people in need; they also can cause societal chaos through inflexibility and hierarchical acts of inhuman authoritarianism. Systems of governance, indeed leaders and people in charge of schools in education can provide resources and teachers and rules and regulations and other things but they can also deny these to communities, often unintentionally. School systems cause challenges for people who are on the edges of educational orders of merit, class, power, influence and who are on the margins of white dominated monolithic, bureaucratic, governance structures. Black people see it as authority which is handed down upon black kids and decisions are made from somewhere central, someplace else and it affects every child's future.

What are the answers for achieving high student outcomes for black kids and indeed, white kids in remote, disadvantaged areas? Is it family background? Is it quality teachers and teaching conditions? Is it leadership that is adaptive to complex black cultures? Is it giving children heterogeneous class experiences in classes of difference rather than similarities of levels and backgrounds?

This is not a degradation of current administrative educational systems. There are, of course many excellent staff and great activities and policy, program and practice elements out there, in local, district, regional and central offices. I acknowledge that fact too. However, the data, as you can see for yourself does draw some broad commentary about what black voices perceive is wrong and needs correcting about Indigenous education. Educational systems of people who govern schools, managers, leaders and workers in these governance structures often unintentionally cause

a perpetuation of inequities. These black voices appreciate and realise that. Everyone is human. We all make mistakes. Whilst intending to be equitable though; people often unwittingly, sometimes intentionally and so often with good faith, but upon many occasions, quite ignorantly, without a perspective of what it means to be, to work and exist in a black community, execute a confused, but powerful negative, directionless, strategy-less chaos upon educational delivery systems in black sites.

White systems are geared for doing better administrative work with middle class, white, suburban communities. And so we hear high academic speakers talking about how great our reading, literacy and mathematical results are on OECD levels and other data print outs. But this hides the ongoing failure of Australian education systems and the tragedy of education for the majority of black Australian kids.

I have seen it all with my own eyes. I see the teachers struggling to teach culturally appropriately. I have felt the pain of community. I see the anger, the frustration, the poverty cycles and the educational consequences.

With the above background I asked the following evaluative questions.

## **PART A Evaluation Questions**

*Major questions:*

- 1. Why do we continue to fail to educate black kids to higher achievement levels?*
- 2. What is it about schools that make these negative results happen?*

*Contributing questions:*

*How can I find out why?*

*Why am I hearing about unrest and despair as well as low morale at this school?*

*How can I evaluate the issues and problems and come up with a reliable and effective way out of the chaos in which I see this school and other schools with white administrations and black kids?*

*More generally what can schools like the one in which I placed my lenses do to respond to this common situation of responding to failure in managing change?*

*How can school staff and leaders increase attendance, settle bad behavior, and raise standards of achievement in these schools?*

*What are the solutions for this school and other schools generally, given the negative Australian data sets about low Indigenous achievement?*

*What can teachers do? What can principals do? What can governments do? What can office staff in education sectors do? What is it we are not doing? What can we do better?*

With the above questions and assumptions from my observations I observed teachers, community and principals, office staff and central office staff over the past 14 months as an in-house/in-school participant observer and visitor of this Indigenous school. I have observed many of the administrative, organizational and teaching issues that have occurred including the crucial community dis-connections and dysfunctions that have happened, not forgetting to note the many positive celebratory occasions.

One must note the many fantastic works and dedication of most teachers, leaders and Indigenous workers "*working their hearts out*" as one teacher and some Indigenous aides mentioned. There is much energy dissipated for the right reasons in these school communities. Much of it can be better led and managed by people with the right attitudes within these systems of educational leadership and administration so that high results are attained and sustained and we do not

continue to sustain recurring cycles of failure. That is my background reasoning for asking the evaluative questions that have led to this paper.

### **Evaluation Methodology**

My study over the last twelve months is a study from the inside of a community, as a colleague and brother and as a participator and observer in the long grass of politics and change within black society. Like a kangaroo watching...I acknowledge that these preliminary reflections are my perspectives, and those I have taken from my black community sources but to my knowledge no study as transparent as this has ever been done, "live"!

The nature of this study as an evaluation takes its roots from the naturalistic philosophy of evaluation of researchers like Stake as noted in Ramsay and Clark, 1990:pp32-39. Parlett and Hamilton's seminal (1972) work on illuminative evaluation noted in Ramsay and Clark's text has been influential in my approach. In a sense I have worked in a social anthropological paradigm, watching, observing and endeavoring not to manipulate factors, influences or in the traditional terms, variables.

My observations have been made in order to initially become knowledgeable about the school site situation, the system and the socio-cultural and educational milieu. I then made further inquiry to focus deeper into the root assumptions of the study and have tried to explain, in my perspectives, the patterns and behaviors and feelings and expressions of my subjects. Where I have parted from the old illuminative approach is I have taken a positional stance about the data. This was not taken lightly. I understand the pointed finger of subjectivity is possible, the notion that this is the writer's perceptions, the idea that evaluation should be "judgment free".

In this case I cannot be non-judgmental. The data cries out for change. It is calling out for action and people to take a stand. Having based my work in ethnography (Wilkinson, 1993), where I have spent a lot of time in the settings, without a formal hypotheses and engaged in an exploratory search together with the importance of being as unobtrusive as humanly possible, I think has given me as an evaluator, a strong reflective power of understanding that is unique. And, I hope I can share the findings and perspectives with you, strongly, assertively, and in a sense of seeking out organizational improvement for the benefit of my respondents and their children.

Many issues remain unsolved in this evaluative study. The data is accumulating as I read, collect information, and listen to authentic Indigenous voices and white voices; as I walk, talk and listen in community circles, as unobtrusively and anonymously as possible. Ethical issues are involved. Should I be anonymous in what I do; should I be interventionist or unobtrusive? Should I tell you and the world by publishing this data? Should I obtain traditional, bureaucratic permission from my employers? Should I remain a shadow observer? Should I merely be a passive participant, immersed observer of events, opinions, feelings and behaviours in the long grasses of socio-economic and complex cultural milieu? The ethics of this evaluation is an acknowledged concern from an institutional perspective. But I sit here and nothing happens. Kids keep falling off the precipice. The world needs to know what people really think in order to devise a real solution. I do not think it is of concern from the community perspective that I tell you their story. I think the general public "need to know" perspective is a good reason to write my story for you. The public should be outraged that they pay "experts" their taxpayers money for no substantial results.

Methodologically, I have chosen to evaluate the state of this school and the community views about it, at a period of time when it is in a state of transitional leadership, from a charismatic leader of vision and action to another with a differing approach. Again, this does not comment upon individuals. It comments upon social and educational dynamics, the relationships, the power dynamics, the connectivity and the rules of engagement of people.

I have acted as a participant observer, as an individual, not tied institutionally to any system. I am the eyes and ears from outside looking inside, a voice that can be heard on such a stage; a voice that can transcend white culture and write for such a conference as this... truly like a wild, Indigenous kangaroo watching in the long grasses, native Australian, caring for the land and its people and concerned for the future- but walking and living inside too. And, my reasons for doing this the way that I have is revolutionary in the sense that it breaks a few mainstream evaluation "rules". It is doing things my way- uninstitutionally; indeed from black Australia.

This is emancipatory evaluation from the opposite side of the fence to the status quo. It is liberation evaluation; it has high stakes for black people. It does not have such high stakes for "white masters". It is black research. It is guerrilla evaluation upon white systems. It is dignified and strong and spiritual; ethical from a black perspective and aimed for a socially just outcome for students. As such it could not have been open and transparent and formal. That would have skewed the answers that people have given.

The notion of evaluation as a reality arose when I decided to present this paper to the Darwin Conference over six months ago. Prior to this idea I was merely randomly collecting chaotic data, interviews, informal conversations, running action workshops for community and teachers, sharing points of view with elders of the community. This data is now more formalized in street walk/pathway interviews; community group interviews; participation and reflections of meetings attended by me; notes from engagement at school development and staff conferences and action committee sessions, attendance at parents group meetings, and the keeping of my evaluator's journal including excerpts of significant discussions with key stakeholders in the community and public service governmental happenings.

At all times individuals have been "anonymised". This is not about individuals. It is about assumptions and behaviours of large systems that continue to perpetuate a type of delivery of educational services that do not really result in great success in Indigenous communities; in spite, I acknowledge, of the best intentions of people in leadership positions within those systems of dominance.

This is an evaluation about the heart, passion, life force, psychology and emotion...of a community. It tells a story of Indigenous Australians on the margins of educational services. It tells a story from black thoughts; black mindsets; not white mindsets and teachers or white thoughts. It is a story not often heard or written, often silent and hidden.

It will challenge and I am sure there will be defensive commentary that will arise. But remember, white people will not have any consequences to their futures from these situations in this article. It is the black kids and families that currently suffer injustices.

The evaluation has been a complex process of unobtrusive and quiet observation of an even more complex social construct I shall name as: institutional structural dominance bordering upon institutional racism. That is not to say that the players in these systems are themselves racist; it is saying though that they operate within systems of power, decision making and dominance often unknowingly, and they are programmed as the black community is sometimes to just do their job within a racist institutional entity. And thus, mediocrity, defensiveness to change, and change to stay the same, continues to perpetuate itself.

So, what is wrong ?

### **Data presentation- Black and white Voices**

Let me say that my evaluation is problem-focussed. It raises and focusses upon challenges. As I have continued to acknowledge on behalf of myself as an observer and my respondents, I acknowledge much good has also occurred. I do not deny that fact. The good things are



appreciated by community.

*But we need to fix the bad stuff.*

As an evaluator I need to focus on some key areas of concern. Let me now present some of what I perceive are the most significant recurring assertions of strong black voices précised from my data over the last fourteen months. These comments are examples of similar comments of a recurring nature. These are all symptoms of a deep, underlying problem that is not just about this school, but about systems generally. It is about structures and decisions made by systematic structures of authority. But then, maybe it is simply about ordinary people. Systems and structures are really in people's minds. We can change these structures. Why don't we ?

Here are some recurring responses which are all integrated. I have for the purposes of understanding and analysis tried to categorise the responses.

A. The Death of an Idea, and a Dream that came true...

But the Birth of a New Movement to sustain Indigenous change.

1. *It is disheartening, emotional, and disturbing to witness the seeming death of an idea that was born in black hearts about this school. The idea was about how great we could be. Look at us now.*
2. *Where have all the positive changes gone?*
3. *This was, a dream, a people with hope, a community, a school which was successful, as it was...now look at it...*
4. *The school as a black voice, a black entity has now gone backwards into something different, not as strong, not as smart and whiter than it was.*
5. *The school is back to its old ways, its old whiteness- the black struggle begins again...*
6. *It is even more upsetting to see and speak with black staff and see how they are back in their boxes.*
7. *We are back where we were 100 years ago when the white fella put us into missions.*
8. *It is sad to see and hear white teachers talk bad stuff about us black staff and it is sad to have to talk bad things about them.*
9. *Our kids suffer.*
10. *They (white staff) come and they go.*
11. *We (community) stay and continue the same as before.*
12. *Our dream is broken for now but our spirit is not broken..it will never be broken.*
13. *We will stand strong-We will fight back.*
14. *They cannot take that away from us.*

B. Administrative power

15. *It is sad to see the administrative decisions ... of District staff, as some influence school staff minds and try to "control" any different thinking.*
16. *They want us to be "white".*
17. *People who run the system do not seem to care about our careers*
18. *They just come here and bull-s... about doing things to make our jobs better. They go*

*away and forget us.*

*19. Blacks don't get real pay, just rubbish salary. We are temporary. We can be discarded. We have no future in these jobs- thanks to Council for helping the school with our salaries*

**C. School curriculum and structural decisions**

- 20. Why are my kids labelled as intellectually disabled this year? Last year they were fantastic.*
- 21. They put my kids in some special education box and there they stay. No wonder they give up. No wonder they are not interested. No wonder they don't want to go to bloody school.*
- 22. They f.. d up my kids' futures.*
- 23. I should sue the b...s. Maybe I will.*
- 24. The teachers and principal are the ones needing special classes.*
- 25. I am a 21<sup>st</sup> century blackfella. I am not "white". I work my mobile phone, my television and travel in my car- I struggle to have an income and support my family. Why can't my kids be treated as 21<sup>st</sup> century kids in this school, rather than like some sort of ancient cultural artifacts.*
- 26. The structures of this school labels kids and puts them into deficit model boxes which blocks them from achieving- it f...s up their lives.*

**D. Community non-involvement**

- 27. They are blind to our needs as a black community.*
- 28. Black voices are silent now, like before the previous principal came here.*
- 29. Some blacks "hide" from and get fed up with white staff now.*
- 30. It is not an equal partnership in some classrooms.*
- 31. Blacks have no say.*

**D. Racism**

- 32. I heard a teacher say the other day : "Don't worry they are only black".*
- 33. In a white school when kids go to swimming classes they have real training and supervision with proper instruction; in our school though anything goes, no one seems to give a stuff about these swimming excursions.*
- 34. At the end of the day they get their fat salaries-and then leave us where we were, leave the kids still not achieving.*
- 35. Sad thing is teachers (many) don't know what they are doing to our kids.*
- 36. Some teachers sometimes send the kids out walkabout and playabout and do not teach in the afternoons- would they do that in Brisbane?*
- 37. They are stuffing up the academic lives of our kids for future failure at high school.*
- 38. They say we do not work hard- but how hard do you work for slavery wages? Would they?*



- 39. *It is bad enough at ....High School, this school is supposed to care for our kids.*
- 40. *It is like the cultural genocide; and it is in white camouflage.*
- 41. *This is the whitest black school I have seen.*

I am aware that these are people's perceptions. But their perceptions are their truths. So there must be something deeply wrong.

My respondents continue:

E. What can we do with old world system recalcitrants ?

1. *We have to turn the system upside down to succeed.*
2. *We should get these deadwood teachers and principals out of schools- retire them early- send them to other places where they can no longer stuff up the lives of our kids.*
3. *We should be having a say everytime a school with Indigenous kids has a new leader. We should help select new teachers.*
4. *We need first class people, not inexperienced teachers.*
5. *We certainly do not need racist teachers here.*
6. *We must now make sure system administrators will be held personally and collectively accountable for the bad educational programs and bad teaching of our kids.*
7. *We do not want to be stuffed around anymore.*
8. *What are the leaders of our system doing for our kids? What are they showing for their fat salaries ? Let them come here and sit in the classroom.*
9. *They just sit in there on their bums in high rises of ..... Street in the city and make rules and say "do this...do that!".*
10. *Let them come here and feel and see and live in this community and come up with answers with us. They treat us like jacky jackies!*
11. *We have to turn people who are in administrative leadership and control into modern, revolutionaries;we must turn their minds upside down.*
12. *We have to shake the old out of them and refill with new thinking, new ways to help kids achieve.*
13. *We have done this in old archetypal management, controlling ways for a long time now; and it has failed black kids and black people.*
14. *It is time to turn this around.*
15. *We have to stand up.*
16. *Our black children and the black community we serve need to be at the top of the pyramid now.*
17. *White people need to let go and get out, unless they are really embraced by our black community.*
18. *Some teachers are racists- and they do not even know they are.*
19. *Others definitely know they are racists- I do not know why they are here.*
20. *The education department never deals with our issues seriously.*

21. *They treat our issues as unimportant.*
22. *They come and look and meet and have a cup-o-tea , feel good and then p... off back to their offices.*
23. *They often have no further stake in these schools apart from their paypackets and investment houses and other concerns far away from black culture.*
24. *It is time they walked away and let black educators and pro-black white teachers do the job of educating black kids.*

My data and feedback for this paper from mainly black community members and my observational experiences seem to suggest some potential answers to the dilemmas. The answers or solutions may lie within conceptual frameworks such as:

- *Black community ownership of schools,*
- *autonomy of decision making from the centre to the field, but dependent upon “withit” administrators who listen to community feelings not foist their own so-called wisdom upon the community.*
- *a central place for black decision making within the structures of authority where Indigenous ideas, plans and authority can be given oxygen to grow and be nurtured,*
- *the urgent training and recruitment and placement of excellent white and black teachers for these communities,*
- *with incentives to stay and make a difference,*
- *the urgent mass training and development of a black cadre of many Indigenous teachers and paraprofessionals to world class educational levels that will make a difference*
- *black organizational leadership ways of doing things,*
- *a rekindling and revaluing of teacher-aides as key elements of success in black kids’ learning*
- *self actualization, and freedom to innovate, and sustain Indigenous schooling*
- *without the slowing down by bureaucratic constraints-*
- *all aimed at higher student outcomes, better literacy and numeracy.*

These ideas above may be one way out of this white schooling and educational administration dilemma.

The comments from respondents are all powerful and strongly made emotionally charged responses.

To listen to them "live" is an experience I will never, ever forget...they remain imprinted upon my brain poignant and humanly powerful.

It takes one back to the cores of injustice when these people and their ancestors were treated like second class citizens, not so very long ago. I ask: Have our white systems changed? Are we really any different now than (say) fifty, thirty, or even ten years ago? Do we reach out for equality and righteousness and enact administrative and educational leadership? Where are the real changes?

Are we merely spin-doctoring and perpetuating more of the same?

These responses in the data presented above are human responses to being disempowered by an authoritarian regime. And, as black kids continue to underachieve, it is any wonder emotionally charged evaluative commentary appears. I wonder would you, the reader, react in any other way if you were in such a life situation and I interviewed you about your children ? Think about that?

**But, this paper is not only about the respondents' voices and structural solutions that might follow. It is also about some potential school cultural solutions from the point of view of school agents and leaders and community members themselves.**

### **Embracing complexity**

As well as the structural solutions suggested above, there is a potential way out of this white educational chaos. It is called: "Embracing black complexity" (Sarra, 2005).

### **Mindsets Change**

1. It is about renurturing black identity, and letting black voices do the talking, walking and teaching.
2. It is about administrative partnering.
3. It is about self actualisation and embracing what is already there ready to act in Indigenous communities.
4. It is about the intellectual capacities, the wisdom and the energy that sits within black people ready to act.
5. It is about recognising through the difficulties and social and family dysfunctionalities, the health and law incidents and the political flak that emanates, the core that is black soul, black spirit and black heritage.
6. It is recognising what is Aboriginal, true, authentic dignity and the strengths that come from such a realization and the generation of excitement and activities and teamwork and collective endeavour that will rise from such a phenomenon- as was shown by the previous black principal of this school.
7. It is about anti-colonialist, non-hierarchical administration; anti-the use of white power and pursuing collaborative black-white endeavors.
8. It is busting old paradigms of power. It is about mindsets change to power holders and enablers.

### **Challenge of the evaluative methodology and the sensitivity of the topic**

Let's begin with the issues and literature frames of reference by citing the direct words of one of my respondents:

*"When I arrived at the school I saw kids upon the roof, stone-throwing in the playground, answering back of teachers, acting out behavior, walk outs and so forth. To reign in a class and get them to work was bedlam".*

And another:

*"...when I walked into the staffroom I heard and saw teachers who were low on morale and very uncaring of their clientele of children- just ready to walk out when the transfer became available. They said terrible things about the kids. So much that I used to have my cupper elsewhere in another room. At one stage a lot of black teacher aides felt more comfortable having a cup-o-tea*

*in another room rather than the staff room. That was segregation happening in reality. People were down-in the kids, saying all sorts of things about black kids; not valuing their culture and blaming "them" rather than looking at themselves".*

And another teacher: *'The school has gone downhill.'*

Yet another: *'It is a shell, where is the leadership?'*

And yet another (community member and parent) *"... we need a black principal (nothing against the current one, that one is a nice person) but we need to be involved in decisions there at the school even more now that.....has gone. Our school is walking backwards."*

A second black community member: *"These people do not understand or know what we want for our kids. These teachers think second class education is good enough. We want and expect the best." "Is that too much to ask?"*

A black elder: *"This place is a white stooge. Why we were not involved on the decision for principal allocation? Who made that decision?"*

Another community member: *"District Office has puppets here. They are protecting each other."*

An old timer: *"We need to get in and clean this place out of racists."*

### **Where do I start ?**

A conceptual map of school organizational leadership and school change issues with one way or solution has been developed using complexity theory below.

Here I was observing in a white systemic school system with black kids a lot of hurt, low morale and quite strong responses- there was some cultural dissonance- nothing was working- what was wrong ? here I was existing in a complex adaptive system. How could the players succeed ?

As a black teacher and educational consultant I found myself quite astounded at the emotions expressed, the anger and the feeling of injustice shown against people in power who according to members interviewed did not show they cared about their black school of children. Many thought that the previous principal had taken this school culturally where it had never been and now it was rolling backwards seemingly, perhaps even unintentionally with systemic help. Change happens in order to stay the same.

Where do I start to unravel this complexity?

Clearly this phenomenon about black within white is not tied to only one small community in Australia. Elements of the dialogue or lack of connectivity, the dissonance culturally and socially, the conforming of any differentiation of ways of doing things, the power decisional dynamics, the authoritative structures must play out in educational and other public service and other circles throughout the nation.

Educationally, however, in search of some theoretical framework I found myself often trying to grapple with the musings of yet other teachers when they noted comments similar to these below:

*"I found myself going to behaviour and discipline frames of reference and noise settling techniques and crowd control ideas. But then, was this what I was paid for?"*

Another teacher mused: *"Were we products of a penal system Australia, of prison type teaching technology; imprison the little buggers and try to make 'em learn?"*

And, *"... is there a way to solve the problems we face? What is causing this dysfunctional school? Is it white mindsets? Is it black mindsets? That's what they tell us all the time- it's our fault, but it is not us who make the decisions".*

In my interpretations I asked: Is it something about control? Or systems of management? or

power? or liberty ? or freedom and motivation?

As another member of the community quoted:

*"Was it old world traditional command and control ? Do as the white power thinks and does and tells?"*

And, I asked: *Where were the Indigenous teachers and aides in all this chaotic milieu? What say did they have? Who owns the school anyway? The community ? The kids ? District and Regional office "mandarins and powerbrokers" ? Central office "hierarchical chair sitters" ? What power do teachers have? White teachers, what is our role here? How do we partner the black teachers?*

These were related issues that added to what I had defined after hearing the respondents as "white systemic chaos"; not meaning chaos in terms of utter confusion but like a river flowing, where there is some strategic direction generally but a closer look shows a lot of ripples and whirlpools and seemingly confused situations, due perhaps to reasons of ignorance, inexperience, beliefs and values dissonance and so on.

I began to talk with key leaders and in particular the black teacher aides and others in the community. In particular I worked and walked and talked with the previous Principal; I worked with regional office and district office staff and current teaching staff.

### **Leadership**

This frustration in the way the school was run and managed by administrators not necessarily within the school was a starting place for discussions to begin anew. I found a keenness to be involved in the decision making by community. People commented that others were scheming and there was political control by white bureaucracy, white managers and deceitful decisions, camouflaged by public service and educa-speak when communicating with people who were concerned about the things occurring structurally and with curriculum and leadership in the school.

Lack of strong leadership; a lack of understanding of an Indigenous community amongst staff; and a lethargy among leaders of the school seemed to exist. Some staff seemed easily prone to see group thinking about the kids as "special class" learners rather than as challenging learners who could achieve anything, looking at and reviewing the sometimes "boring and irrelevant lessons" that they had planned. A community was blamed rather than the school teachers. It was seen by white staff and white executives as a black problem rather than a white problem. And, I observe this in many places, not just in this small school.

Stemming from this organisational culture mindset in the school I also saw white control and black servility. However unintentional- it was occurring. White dominance and black passivity; white power and black confusion. This occurs in so many places in institutions we call: "school" around Australia.

So where do we go from such an organisational stasis situation ?

I continued to gather informal anecdotal and diarised evidence as well as formal staff and hot group committee meetings data. The key experiences for me were the discussions I had with teachers and teacher aides and community leaders.

The data pointed to a dysfunctionality steeped in irrelevance of systems upon a community; inappropriate management styles, leadership that was not there, a staff that was basically not in touch with a community that was used to being involved and in control. It was a changing of the exciting liberated black power for bland white mediocrity. And the kids were feeling it and acting out too.

My approaches to begin a resolution of these situations lie in my work and readings in school

complexity theories, the notions of chaos and the ordering of such through change agency activities of leaders. Olsen and Eoyang (2001), Wilkinson (1993).

## **PART B**

### **Potential solutions through new perspectives and assumptions**

Let's move from the story of the evaluation now towards possible ways to change the status quo.

Firstly, I believe that at the heart of many of the problems in Indigenous schooling is the set of assumptions Western civilisation holds as opposed to Aboriginal and other Indigenous philosophies and world views about such topics as relationships to people and environment. Thus, I wondered if the notion of how the kids see their communal-oriented world was in conflict with the school's (read white teachers) individual competency approach.

Past Western thought place theories of the individual at the centre of systemic change and leadership, making rational choices as to the directions of institutional happenings. But it seems to me this was and is not always the reality in Indigenous societies. The Indigenous teacher – aides recruited by the previous principal were the communal glue of the school; they gave the school meaningfulness, they gave the kids identity and they gave the kids something to strive for; in this case: “strong and smart” philosophies and activities... and now they were power-less with a new principal. Behaviour went out the window too. The school was in a mess.

I grasped at a conceptual framework of complexity, black complexity to try to understand these phenomena of change.

Complexity theories of organisations seem to have wisdom for those of us grappling with issues of embracing complex Indigenous communities and organisations from the prejudged structural requirements and resulting chaos of white society.

A series of system change research assumptions have recently evolved from soft systems and critical systems thinking that emphasize the social aspects of interactional systemic dynamics. Indigenous societies are strongly interactional and relational and communal. Linked to this is our thinking that ideology, power, participation, learning and narratives in the Indigenous social milieu of change takes immediate and more urgent places at the frontline of community, tribal and clan organizational thought, rather than white or western type individualism.

Furthermore, mental models thinking by management researchers arising from a rise of models from computer science, biology, chemists, economists, meteorologists and so forth developing theories of chaos, dissipative structures, synergetics, complex adaptive systems, and non-linear dynamics have a common centrality being given to non-linearity of relationships. This theory seems to touch base with our thinking about Indigenous organisations. Circular dynamics is critical. Similar ideas adapted to sociology and psychology interest us in terms of applications to how to lead Indigenous educational organisations. Stacey (2003).

Characteristics of studies emerging from the new forces of organizational analyses with emphases upon community and organisational wholes, self-organising systems, inherent uncertainty and boundaries to organizations seem more like what we contend with daily in Indigenous communities. Nothing is rational. Causality is not really easily detected in a logical and simple manner for example, in school issues of Indigeneity. Causality is locked into the dichotomous debate of questions of rationalist causality applied to the observer and designer of the system and alternatively, as we argue here, to formative causality applied to the system emerging. Indigenous systems are quickly emerging, dynamic, complex and amorphous interactions of human debate, histories and hopes. Indigenous is really highly non-Indigenous at the same time, it is



dynamically interactional and cross cultural, integrative and complex- a mobile phone discussing genetic research on breakfast shows on plasma television in the morning and engaging in a painted brogga dance in the afternoon.

This raises our thinking about how one can attempt to lead people within such a reality; a dynamic of continuing tides and rips of change. This view of organizations changing has implications for leaders of Indigenous school communities with questions for leaders and managers of change. How do these theories affect the management and leadership approaches taken in our Indigenous school organizations changing? No longer can we be overlaying a tried and true old world way of hierarchical management of colonialist attitudes and non- listening and non-participative structures and cultures anymore. We need to allow Indigenous groups to decide and to walk with them rather than try to influence and cajole and push them along our values and assumptions about what we think is the societal “good”.

Complexity theories challenge the traditional insights of systems thinking with the observer being objective and the individual being central. It is, in reality, not really so...as complexity theories are radically suggesting that human nature is not necessarily controlled and designed and rational. We cannot control, design, and predict natural evolutionary and interactional patterns of human existence. In Indigenous societies, life is extremely complex and there is not just one designer’s hand as a change agent in that community. There is history, ancestry, sisterhoods, brotherhoods, camaraderie’s, families, ancient wisdom, community memories, organisational memes, contemporary issues and institutional influences as well as significant personal and family journeys and interactions. Indigenous schools stem from that complexity of life. Leaders have these challenges to face.

There are new, emerging paradigms of how we interpret organisational systems that have significant implications for our practice in Indigenous schools. As principals, managers, executives, administrators, coordinators, personnel officers, trainers and facilitators of Indigenous education we need to re-think our approaches to changing our organizations, the mindsets and behaviours and cultural frameworks of our staff.

Let’s look at the theories of chaos (Axelrod &Cohen, 1999). Chaos exists outside mathematical computations in the form of weather patterns, for example. The weather has patterns and non-linear relationships within interdependent forces of pressure, temperature, humidity and wind speed. Like schools. When computations are made by meteorologists they reveal what is called a “strange attractor” chaotic pattern; with stability yet instability, predictability yet unpredictability, iterative, recursive, nonlinear systems existing in paradoxical patterns characterized by uncertainty. Like schools, in particular black schools. So with these patterns we can say show recognizable patterns (as in weather) but these are unpredictable, uncertain and chaotic. Those patterns whilst being followed by weather are never exactly the same and thus humans are never able to predict their evolving nature and patterns. Like we do in schools. I certainly and many others did not predict that the authority of administrative decision making through its personnel could have such a negative impact upon a community. Again, it is not personally attacking the players, but the role they have unwittingly played in the game of white chaos and white rule over black communities.

These principles of chaos have been explored in many fields; for example, turbulence in gases and liquids, the spread of diseases, the growth of insect populations; the growth of leaves of trees are self-similar in quality and fractal-like, the reason for no two snowflakes ever being exactly the same is due to chaotic dynamics. (Stacey; 2003: 223) Thus the question: In Indigenous schools are aspects of chaos normality? Are Indigenous culturally complex chaotic systems needing complex adaptive ways to lead and assist kids to learn and achieve better than we have helped them to now? Are we using old recipes for new, dynamic, fluid realities? We hold that schools in

society are in constant chaos, organised chaos, but nevertheless in chaos. Indigenous schools, because of their increased complexity of culture and social milieu are in states of continuing tensions, dynamic interactions and complex chaotic educational responses. Much of the observational data recurs about these themes. No more can we say (as Newton, Bacon and Descartes wrote) that the natural world was machine-like with regular inputs translated through absolutely fixed laws into given outputs anymore. Our so-called democratic institutions of white power over black schools are obsolete. Humans are no longer seen as dominators of nature. How many consultants, advisors, principals, executive directors, and regional directors of schools do you know who are in this old controlling bureaucratic mould? We need to observe the natural laws of Indigenous life. Once one knows how the system would have behaved without human intervention then one knows how to intervene to make things occur. What insights do the above theories offer to leaders in our current schools who work in Indigenous communities?

It is important for those of us trying to lead Indigenous community and organizational life to try to understand what these new systems theories and new sciences offer, particularly for the school in question. If the open systems, cybernetics and system dynamics theories just after the Second World War are now being superseded by chaos, and dissipative structure theory, then what are the implications for organizations generally, indeed, for us, Indigenous organisations? For example; what if: radical unpredictability is the future? Processes of self organization will allow long term outcomes to emerge? Difference, disorder and chance are essential for a creative evolution of an organization? What implications for our Indigenous schools? What implications for how our principals lead? This dynamic between stability and instability; "bounded instability"; a state of ongoing stability and instability; is quite evident in the school in question and I assume Indigenous societies and other school systems.

My goals and continuing work with this community focus upon people's underlying, basic assumptions about schooling and their world views. We ask the question: How would you change your school as a complex chaotic organisational system? Often the answers are linear and rational and logical. But after discussions and analyses people realise it is not a linear process, but is irrational and illogical in emerging to reality.

### **A way ahead**

Traditional and complex adaptive system (CAS) models of school organisational change and new leadership approaches are very different. To change the situations noted above and move this school into a performing and strong and smart school once again we need to do certain actions. We are realising that we have old forms of seeing and perceiving the roles of our institutional forces in the past and we need to develop new ways of seeing and thus leading these entities. Perhaps we need to give the people of this and other communities the power to run schools.

School organisations were once seen as machines, factories, input-outputs, actions and reactions, forces and responses, evolving from Newtonian influences. Many people in our administrative offices still see them as machines. Lots of people who administrate are "just doing their jobs" they tell me, and have not given the slightest thought about how and what they are doing with their actions and decisions and effects upon these black kids. They come to work, collect their pay and continue the process. Failure is perpetuated, unwittingly. How do we change this? They should perhaps retire and let new minds take over... There is a need for changing the mental model of a machine organization, in particular, towards Indigenous schools as the world and the pace and nature of our tasks in Indigenous society change.

Discussions throughout the public service of educational administration need to happen urgently in reference to Indigenous education. And, for some of us, we burn out by standing up and arguing against injustices and silly decisions of power-wielding "bureaucrats" to seemingly small

blockages by mandarins in charge of finance and programs, but whose decisions, like the butterfly in Peru, have a large negative effect upon results in black classrooms.

### **Action**

We as leaders now need to take certain steps towards action, not necessarily in this order:

1. Assess the current situational state of the *containers, differences, and transforming exchanges* (Olsen & Eoyang, 2001) in the school organisation;
2. Select a condition that is easiest to affect, say through a complex force field analysis process,
3. Make an intervention;
4. And then evaluate the shift in the process of the organisation;
5. Then withdraw to allow self-organising to re-fit with the new internal environment and external pressures.

Just like the "small" decisions of bureaucrats and gatekeepers that affect larger outcomes; small immediate changes can have a large impact. Self-organising conditions of schools as organisations are inter-dependent. As the community school system shifts, the change agent/leader repeats the process to re-assess, intervene and evaluate once more prior to further interventions. This is similar to an action research process of query/question /seeks information/ plan/take action/reflect...then go into next cycles of questions/ plans/ actions/ reflections in a systematic manner (part of the procedural culture and sub-cultures of the organisation.) This, again, is not rocket science. But it does need the right principles of operation and positive attitudes towards black kids and community people.

Models of change of these community schools have varied. There have been many successes. But more failures or changes in order to return to failures. In the future and now, we must realise that: Order emerges as opposed to some hierarchical order or linear approach; the systems history is irreversible; the systems future is unpredictable; and...leading agents are the semi-autonomous units that try to maximize "organisational fit" over time. This new paradigm of seeing school organizations emerges from findings in the "new sciences" (Wheatley 1994), chaos, complex adaptive systems, complex processing systems, non-linear dynamics, quantum theory, revolutionary ways of thinking about causality in natural systems. We see these as relevant to Indigenous schools.

Researchers and writers of the emerging paradigm talk about the conditions for self- organisation. These are:

- (I) "Container"... In an Indigenous school this sets the bounds for the self-organising system. It defines the entity, or the "self" that organises. It can be physical eg geographic location; organisational eg department, function; behavioural eg culture, role, conceptual eg identity, purpose, procedures, rules, budgets.
- (II) Secondly: (ii)"Significant Differences"...within an Indigenous school are factors which determine the patterns that emerge during the processes of self-organising. Any difference that exists in the system can serve to shape emerging patterns. CAS can have unlimited differences so the emerging results are full of endless possibilities. It is not about conforming to a white bureaucracy's set of rules. The differences embrace elements of power, expertise, quality, cost, gender, heritage and "race" and culture, and Indigenous students' educational backgrounds.
- (III) Thirdly: (iii) "Transforming Exchanges" are the connections between system agents eg money, information, energy, expertise-the "media" for transforming exchanges....facilitating the changes to the system, together with the differences and the

characteristics of the containers. These materialise in face-to-face meetings, emails, web pages, products and services, financial decision meetings, memos, minutes, departmental newsletters, ministerials, phone calls, and flexible delivery systems of communication. How does this theory work in an Indigenous school system?

The Self-Organising Process moves towards an integrated system in which education is an important hub for Indigenous children. The leadership roles of principals and other school leaders as a change agent/managers are linked closely to this concept of complex adaptive systems philosophy. For example, we now need principals to be untraditional leaders, to know about complexity, to depend upon connections, to be emergent, to be adaptive to uncertainty in the school culture, to expect conflict and deal with these constructively, to share across systems all the working processes and to fit their schools with their environments of culture and socio-economic milieu. To embrace complexity of black life the principals need to understand, among other knowledge, the assumptions about change, below.

Table 1

Complex adaptive system assumptions about change and linking these to the embracing of black complexity

Traditional	<i>Complex adaptive systems</i>
Top down	<i>Depends on connections between system agents</i>
Groups follow predictable stages of development	<i>System agents adapt to uncertainty</i>
Clear goals and structures	<i>Emerging goals, plans and structures</i>
Values consensus	<i>Expects tension between self-similarity and difference</i>
Levels of intervention (individual, group and organisation)	<i>Self-similarity across the system</i>
Defines success as closing the gap with a preferred future	<i>Defines success as fit with the environment</i>

As well as focussing upon the above assumptions, leaders of Indigenous schools must remember to address the artifacts, values and assumptions of the teachers, other Indigenous staff, community members and others in their school. Throughout the journey of change they then develop a collaborative vision for success and higher student achievements. Again, its not rocket science!

Table 2

Uncovering school cultural assumptions and embracing black complexity

Artifacts	<i>Visible organisational structures and processes</i>
Espoused Values	<i>Strategies, goals and philosophies</i>
Basic Underlying Assumptions	<i>Unconscious taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, feelings (ultimate sources for our personal, group and organisational values and actions)</i>

The main role of leadership in uncovering levels of organisational culture (above) and directing these towards progressive outcomes in Indigenous communities is to engage meaningfully with all system people and to foster their interconnectedness, not to try to control those interactions. The interactions among system agents who operate in Indigenous societies produce patterns of

change. In a CAS the system agents are massively entangled so one way to influence change is to influence the interactions such as: counselling, coaching, mentoring, workshopping, asking process questions, providing expertise, or listening and watching, and observing. These are significantly important roles for people in black schools.

### **How can we minimise, eliminate, stall and change Indigenous failures in this school and others?**

Let's at least remember from the data that there is no single source of change, no single source to blame. Whilst my language is strong and emotional it is from the hearts and minds of community as voices for change. In Newtonian physics we borrow language and concepts such as "pressure, forces, momentum, inertia, resistance" etc. Our traditional change strategies are often derived from a force for change; so we find a champion, convince senior management, enforce expectations, and anticipate and overcome resistance.....as if the change is a solid object to be moved from A to B. But this is not sustainable....doomed to failure. No one agent or group in a system can effect change in a deep manner. It is only one source. It is hierarchical and like the playground can be seen as organisational "bullying". Change is complex and there are many interacting sources and feedback loops and interventions, multiple messages, accumulation of integrated activities and actions of teachers and staff and relationship nurturing of staff and students and community by a school leader in an Indigenous school which can help. Principals and other leaders can ensure all these feedback loops operate freely and with relationship, self esteem and trust building and with results productively with directional patterns of behaviour and with minimal interventions and unobtrusively where necessary. Strive for connectivity-organisational and individual learning, communication, iterative processes of relationship building and embracing of black identity, and adaptability through connectivity, dialogue and collaboration with community.

There are dilemmas for change agents in Indigenous communities: Unreadiness for change of leaders, motivation of leaders in trying to introduce a particular change idea, closed pathways of dialogue and thinking and old mental models of managing behaviour, discipline, community voices etc all have an effect upon changing the situation in school..

### **School leadership and system change**

I suggest from the data that we could open up areas for investigation in leadership styles and behaviours, working relationships, appraisal methods etc to open up communication and information channels with Indigenous communities. We could involve senior and middle managers in opening up channels so they experience and see the results and the new energy and growth of cultural strength in the system. They could be principal for a week. We could ensure there are consultants trained in connectivity and communication, dialogue, conflict resolution, negotiation, fierce conversations and group processes ensure they are agents in helping to open up channels and feedback loops as well as continuing the process. This way the system reaches new levels of self organising capacities and new patterns of culture emerge. Group and individual consulting techniques for facilitating change are important in these Indigenous schools. Principals and staff could welcome such moves by system infrastructural entities.

Leaders in Indigenous communities need to learn to adapt their people to dealing with uncertainty. Stages of development of the curriculum, the new project in the school, the community meeting etc. are not always predictable. Organizational changes are non-linear in reality.

The need for control by white staff needs to be submerged. Staff need to realise that goals, however well defined will continue to change and emerge in such school communities subject to ongoing dialogue and debate in the homes. Clear detailed planned goals should be left on the

bookshelf for presenting to system officers when they arrive but I am afraid teaching and learning in Indigenous communities does not flow by a plan or by a book.

In real systems the goals emerge, change, plans and structures will change according to the effects of interactions and the characteristics of the community school, differences of thinking and behaviour of staff and the communicative and transforming exchanges that occur between staff and Indigenous community. What is important is to amplify the differences of views and creative ideas from the community rather than try to build unnatural consensus by suppressing creativity often. A brainstorming process that picks out commonalities does not necessarily move the self-organisation forward. Differences become points for growth. A self-similarity approach of leadership personnel which, in effect, searches for interventions that entwine levels and patterns across levels of interaction and activity and decision making across the life of the school to try to "fit" the new and ever changing environs of the Indigenous community is the natural advantage for such schools as systems.

There are some other key principles that leaders in Indigenous communities who try to embark upon this complex adaptive systems approach must "live" out: Responsibility, authority and decision making are distributed among system agents; variation and experimentation are the vehicles for change; purpose for change is to increase resiliency and capacity for continuous adaptation; and focus of change effort is the current functioning of the organisation. (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999)

There are many mental models of how Indigenous organisations can be changed. Free yourselves from the old paradigms of hierarchy and control. You cannot control anything, really. Well, not as much "control" as we think we can. Life and organisations are much more fluid, flexible and uncertain in these new times. In the end it may be simply to let the human value of the enterprise of the school emerge, surface, finds its place in the learning environments of school workplaces and for administrators to embrace the skills and expertise that is nurtured and emits from the ground. That is not rocket science.

Indigenous societies deserve to self-regulate, evolve, emerge and live out as complex adaptive systems. Indigenous schools are such entities. Leaders should be aware of such characteristics of Indigenous schools and act accordingly. Within my text above lies some wisdom of how to progress through the quagmire and chaos of continuing school failure. But this is the beginning. There is much more to do.

## **Conclusion**

Moving from the above school change and complex adaptive systems development activities oriented to the new paradigm and metaphors of complexity, let us now return to the evaluative issues.

This evaluation asserts that whilst leaders and managers of centralist educational systems can be positive forces for student achievement everywhere, they can be a disempowering challenge to parents and students who are on the societal fringe economically, socially and culturally; who are not central to the decision making and authoritative structures of power. These authorities made up of culturally dissonant people from the so called "fringe" communities, not in real touch with black society hand out decisions and enable consequences to flow in terms of staffing, recruitment, professional development, curriculum change, community involvement and decision making. There is little community "say" in the school or real local influence and community power in the running of these places of learning for black children.

One has to realise that these are disenfranchised people, barnacled, as it were upon the low economic rung of Australian class order, rendered unemployable, rendered unemployment benefits people class, "sit-down" money people and people who in spite of their pride and great



dignity, are not helped to help themselves educationally as much as they can possibly be assisted by systems under our control.

Whilst the white bureaucrats and educational decision making dominators will deny these statements from the community which I present above; nevertheless there is no denying the facts that: leaders, managers and personnel within educational management systems, district and regional offices, and central offices are made up of role playing people, sometimes power-wielding people who have been given structural authority; often people climbing career ladders, people sometimes greedy and threatened by power and people who whilst espousing the rhetoric of Indigenous achievement and change, actually delay, and stop student achievement change occurring.

Some answers to the challenges posed about black, educational, systemic complexities within white structures, may transpire, from this evaluation.

My task has been merely to see, hear, analyse, interpret and comment from the perspectives of my respondents and my own black complexity perspectives. All so-called solutions that do transpire will need to be contextualised for particular sites and communities and groups. *It is not rocket science* as one of my respondents says: But, given the difficulties of societal realities at these places, differing opinions, perspectives and world views, there may possibly be no easy, simple solutions to such complex problems of learning and higher Indigenous achievement.

We read and speak about poorer societies in other continents of the world; I have seen the reality with my own eyes as fact in Australia, the people on the margins of capitalist and so-called democratic, free, societal systems of governance have an ongoing struggle to achieve, to be recognized, to be economically, educationally and socially liberated. Black voices are stifled, black phoenixes are rendered useless in ashes and this situation gives rise to the glowing embers of defiance and a simmering educational revolution. These are my perspectives. I hold them dear and true. Black dots within a white mist. In the end higher student outcomes are affected. The struggle goes on. It really should not be happening. How can it be changed?

This story continues as I observe and participate in the work of teachers in an Indigenous context at this small community school. Because the black spirit lives on in this school and I know in many other black communities Australia-wide, nothing can quench the thirst for emancipation through education; and the silent resolve, the strong sense of all in seeking liberation from the power of administrative control of their school. The patience, the ancient wisdom, the elders knowledge and forthrightness and indeed, even a sense of humour resides; knowing that the moral good is on the side of this community, on many communities, on the side of black. As one respondent cheekily says: *White is black and black is now "white"!*

This whole scenario and dilemma about Indigenous education and the under-achievement of Indigenous kids should come as no surprise. Queensland has a history of separate development. It is in the psyche of public service mindsets and actions of the past. This is a class society. People, unfortunately are placed upon rungs of the economic ladders of opportunity. Sadly, our institutions gave ideas of dealing with blacks to the old South Africa. We, both white Australians and black are programmed to accept this status quo. We are blinded by what is; and, we do not know what we do not know-we do not know what should be. But South Africa has cast apartheid aside now and thankfully begun anew, in spite of their continuing challenges. The revolution here in Australia has not begun.

Mindsets, attitudes of white people, some black and powerful white teachers and administrators are still barnacled in the past, in old silos of power. Many are still old fashioned mission-aries on the road to converting the savages to their ideals. We need passion-aries...fairdinkum, socially and intellectually smart, culturally adaptive and intelligent teachers with a love of black students

and communities, irrespective of their colour or religion or social background. We need technically excellent teachers in these communities who are willing to give 110% to learn about each child and his/her life to help them to grow and learn and achieve like any other kid in this nation. But we need the systemic people, the mindsets and the administrative structures to support them to the utmost. And these systemic people need the right mindsets. That's when things might change.

Many reports in the past, including the recent 2004 Queensland Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal Report into Indigenous Education highlight the ongoing need for improving performance levels of Indigenous students in numeracy and literacy. In policies and strategies and programs much seems to be happening; yet nothing happens; much seems to be said; and yet, results stay the same. Australian Indigenous education is an issue of significance nationally because of the failure of white systems to accelerate the success of black kids academically and socially. Failure has been a hallmark of educational system administrators for decades. And, they allow it to continue, in spite of the rhetoric. Every year we witness, in this 21st century more of the same failures and more of the same excuses. Comments about how we are doing a little better with Indigenous results, but what would the responses be if it were white kids' results? It is as if (from a black person's view) an add-on problem, unimportant; and an ongoing thing we have to deal with gradually. Yet the mandarins will quote figures and statistics to offset these qualitative, sensitivities of a place and a school to protect their cushy jobs and fat salaries. But the reality is that black kids- too many of them- fail. The time is now. The governments and the public servants and administrators would be ousted from their meeting rooms, padded seats, polished desks and car allowances; mobile phones, trips, conferences and three figure salaries, if it was a white problem. People would revolt. The black facts are: Numeracy and literacy rates for Indigenous kids remain well below the achievement of mainstream Australians. Nothing fantastic and world changing is happening to change that. Nothing systemic is really biting into it and really happening. There is much tinkering at the edges, half-hearted efforts- but nothing with real verve, energy, commitment and money and resources to change the status quo. To date, nothing has resulted. Black kids come to school, have a sort of a go, live through the experiences and await on average, under achieving results.

In conclusion, my mind continues unravelling black complex issues, searching for soluble simplicity out of a socio-economic, educational landscape of messiness through adapting and/or changing systems of governance of schools and adaptability to new cultural and social milieu in these varied communities. But my thoughts remain evolving, awash with surprises at continuing micro-political and administrative and power dynamic incidents that are reported to me at these community places. There is a recurring theme.

In reviewing the responses of my data set, I ask: Is it more than structure? Is it really the mindsets of people, how they think about black kids and communities? Is it about how these people in positions of power and resources and rules see their relationships and their stakes with these communities and how they then make authoritative, structurally driven decisions ? Is it these people who, albeit unwittingly and with the best of intentions, perpetuate a continuing failure of Indigenous educational achievement and indirectly a continuing second class life style and life chances of Indigenous Australians ? Because, when it comes down to things, structures are in our minds. Rules are in our minds. Programs, projects, the ways we do things and the regulatory networks are initiated in the minds of each of us. We are the structures we make.

We need to change this structural status quo through renurture-ing black lives, through embracing and developing relationships that are trustworthy, built of high respect and esteem and based upon best practice for the new economy with black Australians. Are we doing this now? We say we are. The rhetoric is everywhere. But we are not doing it. There are still unsatisfactory results.

Our system report card reads: "Must do a lot better..."

Every individual working with Indigenous kids needs to take a look at what might be on his/her report card?

".....has failed again this year!" perhaps.

As one of my community respondents commented: *'It has taken over 200 years and we still ain't got it right- why don't they give 'em the sack and ask somebody else to have a go ?'*

I consider it a privilege to have lived my life as a black Australian. Generally people are fair-minded and supportive of difference. Institutions try hard. But deep within the canyons of many individuals that make up what we call "institutions", in their individual and collective mindsets is an attitude towards Indigenous Australians that is second rate, callous, uncaring, stereotyping and downright, blatantly racist. I have had it relatively easy compared to my brothers and sisters. I am a luckier black Australian than my brother and sisters of these communities which I observe. It is an ironic role to have the task of observing this evolving social dynamic. My ideas are complex, my intentions absolutely geared for goodwill, and my emotions are hurting. Close immersion within black complexity does something to one's soul, one's thinking. It is okay for me. I can leave here. It is okay for you the reader. But these people, these families, these children live here. I want them to succeed here.

Life in a black cultural context with its socio-economic and educational realities of these children and their families is a challenge white Australia has not even begun to get a hold on. And it won't occur until the minds of the people in power allow the interface, the interactive endeavors and the connectivity of people, the ownership and sharing of decision making and power for the future happen in the right way.

I offer this paper and what it says, in conclusion, as an opening up of unsaid realities, as a beginning document for other researchers with heart, mind and soul for black Australian kids, and with research skills far above mine- I challenge you to take up this baton, and help make a difference that has gone on too long.

There are so many wonderful teachers, beautiful kids, great public servants and leaders who are trying so hard to make Indigenous kids reach higher levels of attainment. But there is an ongoing stumbling block that persists. It is intangible and invisible but lies at the very core of educational culture in our systems. It is the basic underlying assumptions that are held by all of us individually, in groups, meeting rooms of power, decision making teams, curriculum development and professional associations and classrooms and staffrooms: about whether these Indigenous children deserve the best teachers, the best teaching, the best resources, the best infrastructures that our democracy can provide. I do not think from what I have observed in one small site that this is in the affirmative. And, as Indigenous people say: this situation is something we as Australians *should be ashamed about*.

After this conference, I will return to these communities, and watch the reactions to my paper, if any; stand next to the eucalypt gums, play cricket with the black kids themselves; and at the end of the day as the sunsets there will be ...stillness; and I, will continue to be observing, waiting for a change- like a kangaroo watching...as I hear the laughter of children playing.

These kids have little hope. These are the kids whose lack of learning are the basis upon which teachers and administrators and leaders like you and me and others more important and influential build careers and futures. This lack of learning *stuffs up their lives*. Have we realized that these are our kids? Our responsibilities? These are the kids who will be our leaders tomorrow. These are the kids who will be our future parents and decision makers. These are the kids also who will be our potential revolutionaries.

All the data I have presented ask educators and administrators and politicians one message:

*Could we, now serve the learning needs of our kids, towards higher student outcomes ?*

*Could we do this together, equally, and more appropriately, more urgently, through bureaucracy, leadership and authorities of education?*

And, so...I ask my final question:

***How much longer must we continue failing before we embrace black complexity successfully ?***

**Mervyn Wilkinson**

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