

# Leadership Learning for Unfamiliar Cultural Contexts

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article addresses a simple question in a complex environment:*

*How do principals and teachers when coming together in an unfamiliar cultural setting, such as an Indigenous community, identify the knowledge they have, and that they may yet need to work well in that environment?*

*One answer is that they will need strategies to enable them to have full and frank discussions of the kind of professional and cultural issues they are likely to encounter. We illustrate this claim with reference to three important concepts from a selection of literature related to working in Indigenous contexts, concepts which informed the design of the Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities (PALLIC) Project. We then outline a strategy we used during that project to provide the circumstances for the creation of 'open intercultural space' in which traditional and Indigenous leadership practices ('both ways' leadership) were raised. To make our discussion of the strategy realistic in this article, we use simulated data to which we add a discussion technique called 'disciplined dialogue' showing the kind of conversations so essential to those who will need to work together in Indigenous environments. To conclude, we use a framework of concerns to ask a series of questions to help principals and teachers to reflect on their knowledge needs as they prepare themselves to work in unfamiliar cultural environments.*

## Introduction

This article is concerned with the movement of principals and teachers into unfamiliar cultural contexts. The impact of contextual influences on leadership practice, particularly when 'closing the gap' is the reform agenda, has been repeatedly documented for at least four decades. Back in the nineties, McLaughlin (1998) drew the following conclusion from at least two decades of her work in American schools: 'to ignore context is to ignore the very elements that make policy

implementation a “problem”, and contribute to the highly variable local responses that trouble policymakers’ (p. 79).

More than 10 years later, when summarising 40 years of leadership research, Hallinger (2011) argued that schools are not static organisations able to be led with a single set of dispositions, strategies or behaviours. He said then: ‘no such list could fully account for the contextually contingent nature of successful leadership practice’ (p. 135). He went on to name three important factors contributing to effective leadership: ‘the impact of the principal’s leadership is mediated by culture, work processes and people’ (p. 137).

Hallinger’s findings reinforce earlier work undertaken during the Cambridge University-led *Carpe Vitam* project in eight countries, emphasising the finding that: ‘context and culture matter and therefore, school leadership is intrinsically bound in time and place’ (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009, p. 1). The undeniable fact from this accumulation of work is that understanding the cultural context is essential for those leading and teaching in schools and if they lack intimate knowledge of the settings in which they are placed, a commitment to professional learning about them becomes an obligation.

To address the specific purpose of the article, namely to describe a helpful strategy to stimulate professional discussions amongst teachers and principals, we first focus on some of the key concepts from the literature known to be important when working with Indigenous peoples (Frawley & Fasoli, 2012). We then show how these concepts were used to inform the design of the Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities (PALLIC) Project from which we have extracted the strategy we want to elaborate in this article. This strategy combines a questionnaire with simulated data enabling principals and teachers to engage in ‘disciplined dialogue’ which may unmask common ground and possible prejudices in knowledge about Indigenous cultural contexts. To conclude the article, we pose a series of questions about principals’ and teachers’ cultural knowledge concerns based on the seminal work of Hall and Loucks (1978). These questions are aimed at stimulating principals’ and teachers’ personal reflection on their leadership and professional learning needs as they move into new cultural surroundings.

## **Key Concepts from the Literature**

The three concepts we have selected from relevant literature are: intercultural space, ‘both ways’ leadership, and culturally responsive conversations where ‘yarning’ is an important socio-cultural phenomenon, defined later. Initially, we deal with the first two concepts to illustrate the tie between them: intercultural space and ‘both ways’ leadership.

### **Intercultural space and ‘both ways’ leadership**

Russell Taylor, the former head of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra, provided a helpful and succinct description of the type of space that needs to be created for different cultures to work together. Taylor (2003) uses the term ‘intercultural’ to describe this space defining it as:

[T]he ‘meeting of two distinct cultures’ through processes and interactions which retain the distinctive integrity and difference of both cultures and which may involve a blending of elements of both cultures but never the domination of one over another ... (p. 45)

Priest et al. (2008) add to Taylor’s definition with their view of interculturalism as a ‘both ways’ learning process saying:

[A] learning environment will be ‘both ways’ where there is a blend of mainstream and Indigenous cultural knowledge being taught. An ideal ‘both ways’ environment places equal value and respect on *quality practices* from both ... non-Aboriginal and ... Aboriginal cultures. (p. 118)

The continued domination of a mainstream culture is problematic for ‘both ways’ leadership practice when working with Indigenous cultures. Priest et al. (2008) highlight the assumptions underpinning conventional (mainstream) leadership practice alongside a model they have called ‘Warrki Jarrinjaku’ leadership as a way of contrasting the differences in approach when one culture is viewed as superior to the other and, alternatively, when both are considered to be of equal value. The extract, included as Figure 1, shows two of the categories they used to define differences in leadership practice: relationships over service provision, and the measurement of performance. Two further categories are mentioned later in the article.

**FIGURE 1: EXTRACT FROM TRADITIONAL AND WARRKI JARRINJAKU LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES**

Conventional practice	Warrki Jarrinjaku leadership model
<p>It is assumed that Anangu are deficient in a number of areas. The aim is to ‘fix the problem’ by addressing Anangu deficiencies.</p>	<p>Anangu cultural knowledge is formally recognised as being of equal value to mainstream knowledge. The limitations of mainstream knowledge, in relation to its ability to ‘fix the crisis’ for Anangu, are recognised.</p>
<p>Key features of conventional practice include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• service models are designed by non-Anangu;</li> <li>• service delivery is heavily reliant on non-Anangu;</li> <li>• it is believed that services cannot operate without non-Anangu staff;</li> <li>• the service may be described as being ‘both ways’; however, in reality it is dominated by mainstream culture and values;</li> <li>• non-Anangu usually hold the most powerful positions and make many decisions on behalf of the Anangu.</li> <li>• non-Anangu staff focus on the difficulties they encounter providing services to Anangu.</li> </ul>	<p>Key features of Warrki Jarrinjaku include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• service models designed by Anangu in genuine partnership with professional non-Anangu who facilitate the process (see Warrki Jarrinjaku principles and practices);</li> <li>• service delivery relies heavily on Anangu;</li> <li>• non-Anangu staff perform a specific function in the service – they are not the ‘boss’</li> <li>• the aim is to equally value and respect quality practices from both mainstream and Anangu culture;</li> <li>• Anangu speak for themselves.</li> </ul>
<p>Performance is measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the experiences of non-Anangu staff;</li> <li>• reports provided by non-Anangu staff;</li> <li>• the outputs</li> </ul>	<p>Performance is measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the experiences of Anangu;</li> <li>• reports provided by Anangu;</li> <li>• the outcomes for Anangu</li> </ul>

Source: From Priest et al. (2008, pp. 123-124).

Priest et al. (2008) show that equal value matters to counter the unconscious dominance of mainstream culture when services are extended to Aboriginal people. They describe cultural dominance as: ‘the imposition of western practices within a broadly paternalistic framework, assuming the superiority of mainstream views’ (p. 123).

This anti-mainstream stance is put pointedly by McConvell (2000) who argues that there should be a sharing of power and information between *whitefellas* and *blackfellas* rather than everything coming one way from the *whitefella*. Frawley et al. (2010) suggest that this kind of power and information sharing should involve interactive processes in open inter-cultural space or in their words, ‘in between space’: ‘a space where compromise, negotiation and respect for difference predominate’ (p. 8).

Other authors (Chan et al., 2008; Collard, 2007) use the term ‘combined space’ when referring to interculturalism, highlighting ‘combined space’ as newly created forums:

[W]here hybrid forms of knowledge and skills are enriched. This is an intercultural space where leadership is informed by both the specific culture in which it is located, and western theories and leadership practice from which it is influenced. (Chan et al., 2008, p. 72)

The common assumption underpinning the views of the authors featured above is that bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together in the provision of services relies on understanding and acknowledging that Indigenous peoples are experts in their fields and that any kind of improvement should build on this expertise and their strengths.

### **Culturally responsive conversations and ‘yarning’**

Our final focus in this select literature review involves a short discussion of views on the concept of culturally responsive conversations, particularly as they apply to leadership and learning in Indigenous school communities. The importance of professional conversations is well described in recent literature (Danielson, 2009; Earl & Timperley, 2009; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; Swaffield & Dempster, 2009). These authors use terms such as ‘constructive problem talk’ (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009), ‘professional learning conversations’ (Danielson, 2009; Earl & Timperley, 2009) and ‘disciplined dialogue’ (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009) to describe professional conversations. No matter the term, the work of these researchers underlines the need for planned, deliberate, evidence-informed dialogue about learning and the conditions influencing it. In intercultural settings, the need for culturally respectful and evidence-informed conversations is as fundamental as the relationships on which productive conversations depend (Frawley et al., 2010).

McNaughton and Lai (2009) talk of the need to create spaces for regular dialogue, sharing, reflection, collective sense-making, and planning, never assuming that dialogue in intercultural settings is automatic. They go further to argue that a clear, local, evidence-based focus on student engagement and learning should be the core of these kinds of conversations. In Indigenous communities, the colloquial term used for conversation is ‘yarning’. Flückiger, Diamond and Jones (2012) refer to ‘yarning space’ as a space that is: ‘not so much a physical location as a positioning or socio-cultural strategy for communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries’ (p. 53). Yarning space allows people to ‘yarn up’ so all voices are heard (Burchill, 2004), acknowledging and encompassing the importance of multi-vocality.

Conversations in partnership between *whitefellas* and *blackfellas* understandably require supportive relationships built on trust and respect but first and foremost, a desire to work together and a genuine understanding that traditional western perspectives should neither dominate nor alienate those engaged in yarning. Indeed, in the words of *What Works* (2013): ‘You can’t have a partnership without a relationship, and you can’t have a relationship without a conversation. You’ve got to have the conversation. Everything starts here’ (Forming partnerships, opening quote).

Because of the call for trust and respect, principals and teachers need to know and understand that ‘yarning’ is an essential interactive strategy in Indigenous communities.

Overall, this brief discussion has brought into the foreground: (i) the prominence given to professional conversations about learning based on sound evidence; (ii) the primacy of local knowledge as a source of evidence in cross cultural settings; and (iii) the focus of adult conversations on mutual concerns for local student learning. What is critical, however, is a constructive relationship which encourages open, frank, respectful and robust intercultural dialogue.

## **A Strategy to Stimulate Discussions about Understandings of Intercultural Space and ‘Both Ways’ Leadership**

Having raised and discussed three concepts that we advocate are essential for principals and teachers to understand, we now turn to explain the use of a two part strategy designed to stimulate intercultural conversations about leadership and professional learning in Indigenous school communities. The strategy involves the completion of a questionnaire and the conduct of a professional conversation using ‘disciplined dialogue’ (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009) processes. In doing so, we emphasise that although the strategy begins with a questionnaire to gather information from principals and teachers related to the leadership of reading, it is not an instrument for research purposes. Rather, it is more aptly regarded as a stimulus for professional conversations, and eventual ‘yarning’. MacBeath (2001, p. 4) uses the term ‘tin openers’ to distinguish (from actual research instruments) techniques used inside schools designed to focus discussions on collections of evidence gained locally. This questionnaire is such a ‘tin opener’ and it was used in many schools by principals with their teachers and Indigenous Leadership Partners (during the PALLIC Project).

We demonstrate the helpful nature of the discussion the questionnaire stimulates by analysing simulated data from fictitious teachers using the three *disciplined dialogue* questions employed during the PALLIC Project. From our experience, we know that the discussions, while confronting, can reveal gaps in the knowledge of both principals and teachers as well as pointers to ideas which help *whitefellas* see more clearly the need for conversations in open intercultural space and about leadership ‘both ways’ (Priest et al., 2008).

### **The questionnaire**

The questionnaire titled: *Leadership Perspectives*, was developed using the work of Priest et al. (2008) as the source for ideas about the differences between *Accepted or Conventional* leadership practice and *Intercultural* leadership practice. This distinction picks up key aspects of leadership

research found in the supporting literature examined for this article. The questionnaire was produced and used during 2011-2012 in the *Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities* (PALLIC) Project to which reference has already been made.

As shown in the Figure 1 extract taken from their research with Indigenous people, Priest et al. (2008, p. 123) described polar leadership positions in the provision of services in Indigenous communities. The typical characteristics of 'accepted or conventional' practice in mainstream Australia were counter-posed with the leadership practices of Warrki Jarrinjaku (translated briefly as 'working together, everyone listening'). The assumption underpinning mainstream western practice, they say, is that Anangu (a particular group of Indigenous people from north western South Australia) are deficient in a number of areas. The aim is to 'fix the problem' by addressing Anangu deficiencies (p. 123). Alternatively, the assumption underpinning the Warrki Jarrinjaku leadership position is to treat senior Anangu as knowledgeable in their field. The aim is to build on Anangu strengths and expertise (p. 123). These two competing positions, derived from research with people from the Great Western Desert, were used as the starting points to develop a questionnaire to ascertain some of the often unspoken beliefs held by principals and teachers in particular, as they undertake work with Indigenous people. At the same time, we considered it essential that the strategy be capable of ascertaining the views of Indigenous people about the leadership of learning so that they could be included, acknowledged and valued in intercultural or 'both ways' discussions with school leaders and teachers. We considered the four categories articulated by Priest et al. (2008), namely, support for service provision, the measurement and reporting of performance, involvement in training, and participation in decision making as we undertook the design of our questionnaire. These categories were our spring board for thinking about what might be applicable to the leadership of reading. Eventually we defined the following five categories because of the focus of our work on reading:

Category A Involvement in reading improvement

Category B General school support

Category C Judging performance in reading

Category D Participation in training

Category E Participation in decision making

Using ideas from Priest et al. (2008) and the concepts central to the design of the PALLIC Project, we generated a list of items for each of the five categories above, typifying both leadership types, that is, 'accepted or conventional' western leadership practice and 'intercultural leadership practice'. The 30 items in the questionnaire, for our purposes here, are broken into two short versions (see Table 1) but the items were randomised and the categories were not shown in the principals' and teachers' copies when used in the schools. The two versions can be administered some time apart, for example, two weeks. School principals complete the questionnaire first, then ask their teachers to do so before discussing the results with them, (and we suggest at a later date with their Indigenous Community members). Results should be displayed in the five categories and against the two positions only at the time of discussion.

Having described the questionnaire, we now undertake the fictitious discussion of simulated data to show the kind of knowledge needs that our two-part evidence-informed discussion strategy can bring to centre stage for both principals and teachers.

**TABLE 1. LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please rate the strength of your agreement with the following statements using the 4 point Scale:  
A – Always; O – Often; S – Seldom; N – Never.

**Version 1****Conventional Leadership Practice****Version 2****Intercultural Leadership Practice**

<b>Category A: Involvement in reading improvement</b>	<b>Category A: Involvement in reading improvement</b>
1. Reading improvement practices are designed, planned and prepared by non-Indigenous educational professionals	16. Reading improvement practices are designed in genuine partnership with Indigenous people
2. Reading improvement processes are heavily reliant on non-Indigenous professionals	17. Reading improvement strategies rely heavily on Indigenous people
3. The leaders of reading are non-Indigenous professionals	18. The leaders of reading include Indigenous people
4. It is true that improvements in reading cannot occur without non-Indigenous staff	19. It is true that improvements in children's reading cannot occur without Indigenous people
5. Reading improvement strategies accept a mainstream belief in the over-riding value of Standard Australian English over other languages	20. Reading improvement strategies place a heavy value on the importance of Indigenous languages
<b>Category B: General school support</b>	<b>Category B: General school support</b>
6. Indigenous people avoid working in support of the school	21. Indigenous people attend and support the school willingly and freely
7. Non-Indigenous professionals speak on behalf of Indigenous people about education	22. Indigenous people speak for themselves about education
8. Non-Indigenous members of school staff focus on the difficulties in providing improved reading for Indigenous children	23. Non-Indigenous professionals actively seek improvement solutions in conversations with Indigenous people
<b>Category C: Judging performance in reading</b>	<b>Category C: Judging performance in reading</b>
9. Performance in reading is measured against mainstream English language benchmarks	24. Performance in reading is measured against the experiences of Indigenous people
10. Performance in reading is based on the judgments of non-Indigenous professionals	25. Performance in reading is based on the judgements of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
11. Reports on reading are prepared by non-Indigenous professionals	26. Reports on reading are provided by Indigenous people
<b>Category D: Participation in training</b>	<b>Category D: Participation in training</b>
12. Information or training sessions are 'one way teaching' from non-Indigenous to Indigenous people	27. Information and training sessions are 'two-way' with Indigenous people being teachers
13. Indigenous people choose not to attend information or training sessions	28. Indigenous people want to undertake training and to share in information sessions
<b>Category E: Participation in decision-making</b>	<b>Category E: Participation in decision-making</b>
14. School committees are dominated by non-Indigenous professionals	29. School committees are made up solely of Indigenous community members
15. School committees make decisions and then inform Indigenous parents and families about what has been decided	30. School committees include Indigenous community members as key contributors to decisions

Table 2 records in percentages the simulated data gathered from a mythical 50 respondents. It shows, for the sake of brevity, data for only one of the five categories listed above, namely, Category A, *Involvement in Reading Improvement*. It should be noted that the results for Version No. 1 and No. 2 have been brought together in the one place to enable comparisons to be made and differences noted.

**TABLE 2. SIMULATED DATA FOR CATEGORY A: INVOLVEMENT IN READING IMPROVEMENT**

**Leadership Perspectives Questionnaire**

**Version No. 1:**

**Version No. 2:**

Accepted or Conventional Leadership Practice Category A	A	O	S	N	Intercultural Leadership Practice Category A	A	O	S	N
1. Reading improvement practices are designed, planned and prepared by non-Indigenous educational professionals	90	10	-	-	16. Reading improvement practices are designed in genuine partnership with Indigenous people	-	-	10	90
2. Reading improvement processes are heavily reliant on non-Indigenous professionals	80	10	10	-	17. Reading improvement strategies rely heavily on Indigenous people	-	-	20	80
3. The leaders of reading are non-Indigenous professionals	100	-	-	-	18. The leaders of reading include Indigenous people	-	-	-	100
4. It is true that improvements in reading cannot occur without non-Indigenous staff	75	-	10	15	19. It is true that improvements in children's reading cannot occur without Indigenous people	-	-	25	75
5. Reading improvement strategies accept a mainstream belief in the over-riding value of Standard Australian English over other languages	70	30	-	-	20. Reading improvement strategies place a heavy value on the importance of Indigenous languages	-	-	-	100
TOTALS	415	50	20	15	TOTALS	0	0	55	445

The discussion of the simulated data presented in Table 2 follows the professional conversation pattern we trained school principals and teachers to use with their own in-school data during the PALLIC Project. That pattern unfolds using three 'disciplined dialogue' questions (Dempster, 2012, p. 14):

1. What do we see in these data?
2. Why are we seeing what we are?
3. What, if anything, should we be doing about it?

We now undertake a demonstration discussion of the simulated data against each of these questions to illustrate the second part of the strategy. Knowledge to support the demonstration discussion is drawn from general information we gained during the PALLIC Project.

### **What do we see in these data?**

We suggest that the principal includes his or her responses in the preparation of a general summary of the data from both versions. It would help to prepare the summary with several teachers. A sample summary follows.

We note that Table 2 shows overall, there were far more responses recorded on the frequency of 'Accepted or Conventional Leadership Practice' than on 'Intercultural Leadership Practice'. The totals for Version 1 for practices seen *Always* (415) and *Often* (50) and practices seen *Sometimes* (20) or *Never* (15) show up a stark divide in favour of conventional or mainstream western approaches. When these data are compared with the responses in Version 2, we see that no one felt that any of the 'Intercultural Leadership Practices' occurred *Always* or *Often*. Indeed, all said that they occurred *Seldom* (55) or *Never* (445).

For the sake of our discussion we have now selected one row for detailed 'disciplined dialogue'. That row contains Item 1, from Version 1 'reading improvement practices are designed, planned and prepared by non-Indigenous educational professionals' and its counterpart, Item 16 from Version 2 'reading improvement practices are designed in genuine partnership with Indigenous people'.

What the principal and teachers need to focus their conversation on is describing the results to ensure they understand what has been recorded. Our summary below tries to do this. Each speaker is named at the beginning of the dialogue.

Principal. As Table 2 shows, our responses to the two items on the involvement of Indigenous people in the planning and preparation of reading improvement practices are mirror images. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents believe that these processes are 'Always' undertaken by non-Indigenous educational professionals while ten percent (10%) believe that genuine partnership in these processes 'Never' occurs. Overall, these data suggest that we whitefella professionals retain control of these matters and that leadership 'both ways' is not in our thinking.

### **Why are we seeing what we are?**

In addressing the second 'disciplined dialogue' question, the principal and teachers look for reasons why these results occurred, based on knowledge of their school's context, their own experience and personal understanding. This is the way the conversation might proceed:

Teacher No. 1. One of the reasons why we have results showing whitefella dominance could be that in our school we are not yet able to plan with people from the community because we are still at an awareness raising stage for ourselves about Indigenous children's reading. I don't think we are ready to take steps beyond the school.

Teacher No. 2. That's a weak excuse! I don't think that we really understand Indigenous culture sufficiently and ways in which we might be more inclusive.

Teacher No. 1. While you might be right, I think that most of us would hold the view that Indigenous people's English language usage in this community would not help them to become active in planning for reading improvement.

Teacher No. 3. That's a bit of a 'cop out' since we haven't tried to find out if this is the case. I mean, the results from the questionnaire show us up to be pretty exclusivist. In fact, I suggest that the reason we are seeing what we are, is that we have not yet engaged in any meaningful outreach to find mutual benefits for children from connections beyond the front gate.

Teacher No. 4. I think that one of the reasons why the questionnaire highlights our control of literacy planning and preparation is that none of us can speak the local language. In the last school I was at, the principal could, and it made all the difference. I'm not saying that this is essential but I'm sure it helps.

Teacher No. 3. Yes, I think it would help everyone, but language learning takes time and with the principal and teacher turnover we experience here, it just doesn't seem feasible. If we are going to make better connections, we need to do things that have some immediate and visible effect.

The demonstration conversation above leads directly into the third of the 'disciplined dialogue' questions. This question asks the principal and teachers to address what they agree is the most significant of the reasons raised.

### **What, if anything, should we be doing about it?**

Discussion of this question is based on an agreement between the principal and teachers that authentic connections need to be made with family and community members if reading improvement is to be jointly planned and practised. The following discussion includes the kind of ideas and approaches that might be raised:

Teacher No.1. Our Indigenous Leadership Partners can help us make better connections with members of our community. We could try inviting parents to come to the school during the school day with open afternoons or at other times with Night School opportunities followed by a barbecue.

Teacher No. 2. How about we invite parents and family members to weekly assemblies?

Teacher No. 3. Good idea, but how about taking the weekly assemblies out into the community, say outside the shop where everyone goes?

Teacher No. 4. I think it's important to work with our Teacher Assistants because they can take ideas about literacy learning to parents in the community. They can be conduits between home and school and act on our behalf because they can talk to parents in their first language. They might also share ideas about how Indigenous parents can help their children's literacy learning at home – and we need to know about this.

Teacher No. 5. Let's build on something already happening. We've got some of the pre-school mothers talking to the brothers and sisters of their school-aged children about the

photographs we've displayed on the walls around the school. These show their children's learning activities complete with captions. I think that this helps when Indigenous parents are reluctant to enter the classroom.

Teacher No. 6. Displays are good ice-breakers. We should make panels of word lists in both languages and display them outside the local shop. The children and their parents will be interested in talking about these with each other. This will get some print into the community.

Principal. I think all of these are good ideas but I also think that we need more professional learning to help us think about better teaching strategies for second language learners here who are unaccustomed to print. I also think that we need greater awareness of the differences in learning approaches helpful in communities such as ours. The questionnaire shows that we have concerns with the way we are connecting with Indigenous people. Perhaps we should include Indigenous people in some of our professional development sessions. We need to go beyond seeing learning as 'whitefella' or 'Indigenous' – we need to talk and learn together.

The principal's final comment above points to a clear need to take the concepts of open intercultural space and 'both ways' leadership into genuine conversations or yarning with Indigenous people so that their perspectives are given equal weight as principals and teachers expand their cultural knowledge.

The discussion of the simulated data presented in Table 2 has illustrated how the three 'disciplined dialogue' questions can act as the stimulus for professional conversations which recognise local realities. We know from the school use of the questionnaire during the PALLIC Project that its administration required a strong commitment by principals and teachers to evidence-informed discussions and decision making, and courage in some situations to ask themselves difficult cultural knowledge questions and to act on the responses.

To sum up, discussion of the questionnaire data can expose principals' and teachers' needs for knowledge about the distance to be travelled if open intercultural space is to be created and for leadership 'both ways' to become automatic in Indigenous communities. Our demonstration suggests that the obligation to acquire cultural literacy begins with principals and teachers on appointment. They will have many learning concerns, especially we believe, about the three concepts we discussed earlier in the article and which the use of the questionnaire strategy highlights. Hall and Loucks (1978) in their Concerns Based Adoption Model, have shown that three kinds of concerns arise when individuals move to new locations to take up new tasks. We turn in the last part of the article to show how these concerns can be applied to questions about what a principal and teachers need to learn regarding the three concepts.

## **Principals' and Teachers' Knowledge Concerns**

We now use Hall and Loucks' (1978) three generic concerns (for self, task and impact) as an inquiry framework for principals and teachers making the transition to unfamiliar cultural contexts. The framework encourages personal reflection on the concepts of intercultural space, 'both ways' leadership, professional conversations and yarning.

Q1: When we make the transition to an unfamiliar cultural context, what will we have to learn? (self knowledge)

- What do we need to learn about the creation of intercultural space?
- What do we need to know about leadership and professional learning in this cultural context?
- What do we need to learn about ‘yarning’?

Q2: What tasks will we have to understand and take on to manage this transition? (task knowledge)

- What strategies do we need to create open intercultural space?
- What do we need to know about the actions which will ensure leadership and professional learning occur ‘both ways’?
- How is yarning best undertaken in this community?

Q3: What do we know about the impact and effect of what we are doing in this cultural setting? (impact knowledge)

- How will we know when intercultural space is an accepted medium for our work here?
- When will we be able to tell that leadership and professional learning ‘both ways’ is occurring authentically?
- When would we be able to say that our yarning has created successful relationships?

We have argued that the three concepts embedded in the questions above are indicative of the kinds of knowledge concerns principals and teachers have when taking up appointments in unfamiliar Indigenous contexts. We suggest however, that these concerns and the cultural concepts they address have general qualities with valuable applications to a wider range of contexts than those which we have used in this illustration from an Indigenous Australian setting. We ask: would not knowledge of open intercultural space, ‘both ways’ leadership and professional learning, and other language equivalents of ‘yarning’, be helpful to principals and teachers taking up duty in schools for refugee children, schools for migrant groups, indeed schools where conventional or mainstream practice rubs up against cultural difference? Unreservedly, we argue this to be so.

## **Conclusion**

This article has acknowledged the significance of culture on leadership and professional learning practices, showing through an illustrative example from Indigenous Australia, the importance of three key concepts intrinsic to working with Indigenous people. We have argued that these key concepts are essential components of principals’ and teachers’ learning, should they move to work in Indigenous communities. More than this, however, we have illustrated the kind of learning in which principals and teachers need to engage if they are to understand the concepts of intercultural space and ‘both ways’ leadership and professional learning using a two part strategy to unmask common ground and possible prejudices held by teachers and principals. We have further argued that the three concepts point to the kind of knowledge concerns principals and teachers will have on first hearing about their appointments to an Indigenous cultural context. More than this though, we have argued that knowledge of these concepts will prepare principals and teachers for contexts in which different cultural persuasions prevail. A limitation of this article is that it provides an

example of but one strategy to enable people to engage with necessary knowledge acquisition. Our example illustrates knowledge about intercultural space and ‘both ways’ leadership and professional learning. Different strategies will be necessary for learning about other cultural concepts but these are beyond the scope of this article.

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