Theorising Empowerment Practice from the Pacific and Indigenous Australia

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Chapter 3

Social Empowerment Education Program – New Narratives

“[O]ne way out of this is through creating a new narrative ...”

Sister Emi Frances Oh, response to questionnaire (Barcham 2009)

3.1 Part I – Profile

3.1.1 Introduction

The Social Empowerment Education Program (SEEP) began in 2001 as one component program of the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA), based in Suva, Fiji. To demonstrate the challenges confronted by civil society organisations in Fiji, the origins of ECREA and SEEP are here interwoven with some of the fraught politics of the island state.

From Independence in 1970 until the formation of the Fiji Labour Party in 1985, ethnic Fijians dominated the Fijian parliament. In 1987, a coalition led by Timoci Bavadra, an ethnic Indian, won power for the Fiji Labour Party. In the same year, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, a figure who bound together “Christianity, chieftiness and politics” (Tomlinson 2011), led a coup to restore ethnic Fijian rule. Thousands of ethnic Indians fled the country. Rabuka held new elections after introducing a racially discriminatory constitution in 1990. At that time, seeking to respond to “escalating religious tension, racial strife, poverty and unemployment” (Khan 2008), a group known as the Fiji Institute of Contextual Theology formed, changing its name to the Fiji Council of Churches Research Group on becoming a member of the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC) in 1991.

By 1997, Fiji again had a racially non-discriminatory constitution, and in 1999 the Fiji Labour Party formed a government led by Mahendra Chaudhry, like Bavadra before him, an ethnic Indian. In the interim, in 1998, the FCC Research Group held a strategic planning workshop. The participants at the workshop highlighted “the need to empower people and their communities for participation and involvement in the social, economic and political issues that affect their lives and the lives of others in the wider community” (Khan 2003).
In May 2000, businessman George Speight and retired major Ilisoni Ligairi stormed parliament, again aiming to make Indigenous Fijians politically dominant. Taking Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and his cabinet hostage, Speight proclaimed himself acting premier. The President, Ratu Mara, sacked the Chaudhry government on the orders of Fiji’s Great Council of Chiefs. In late 2000, following a “relationship review” (ECREA 2011) with the FCC, the Research Group registered under the Charitable Trust Act using the name Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA).

ECREA was officially launched on 25 October 2001. Its aims are to address the social, religious, economic and political issues facing Fiji by subscribing to the principles of social justice and equity, integral human development, and servant leadership. ECREA is a member of the Asia-Pacific Research Network, World Association for Christian Community, Jubilee South, and the Asian Coalition for Human Rights (ECREA 2011).

In a pamphlet produced in 2001 entitled “Community Empowerment”, ECREA places itself firmly in an activist role in civil society:

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Democracy is often described as “government of the people, for the people, by the people”. It will only really succeed if we, the ordinary people, get involved and continually participate in the life of society – challenging our leaders and urging them to respond to the needs we see around us (ECREA 2001).
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Also in 2001, a six-month pilot program called the Social Empowerment and Education Program (SEEP) was initiated by ECREA. In response to the 2000 coup, ECREA conceived SEEP as a means to seek restorative justice and empower Indigenous Fijians to participate in civil society beyond the ballot. Given the activist role envisaged by ECREA, it is worth taking a moment to further consider the complex environment in which SEEP operates.

The Indigenous Fijian social context has several layers of highly structured and formal leadership. From colonial times, land registration has existed through the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB), which regulates landowner identity through registration of villages and mataqali, the land-owning entity represented by leaders of family groups. As a consequence, the NLTB has a powerful influence over development decisions and the distribution of financial benefit from land rent or compensation. The mataqali is a sub-set of both the village (koro), and the clan (yavusa). At the village level, there will be both a chief of the mataqali and a chief of the village, the latter being an
administrative position created in colonial times, as well as pastors and/or catechists. Groups of koro form a tikina or district, which can be different from an administrative district. All Indigenous Fijians (taukei ni qele: “owners of soil”) are united by vanua, the system of chiefly kingdoms and common people together, incorporating both land and people.

As well as these parallel structures of modern and traditional leadership and land ownership, religion places another layer of strain on community coherence. There are a large number of Christian sects at work in Fiji, each competing for congregations, and each with different interpretations of leadership and of who is privileged in opportunities to preach and conduct ritual. Even small koro may host more than one sect. Muslim and Hindu faiths are also prominent.

Fijian Independence placed over this complexity an electoral process for selection of government representatives, and a parliamentary system of adversarial debate. The author suggests that it is not unreasonable to expect that with so many sources of legitimation, alternative forms of authority are likely to be asserted in these circumstances. It is the author’s view that Fiji’s “coup culture” (Oh 2009) is one expression of this. This is not to condone government-by-force, but it does place emphasis on the historically determined structures that lead to coup culture, rather than the specific actors. It is the author’s view that “coup culture” is a response to dealing with a highly complex and difficult post-colonial environment. Part of that response is based in ethnic differentiation between the Fijian descendants of indentured Indian labourers and Indigenous Fijians – a further layer of tension and complexity in this small island state. The Indigenous population was legally prevented from participation in the colonial economy, while the chiefly system of governance was permitted to continue and was itself co-opted into the colonial governance structure. The British largely went home at Independence. The Indians had made home in Fiji (Douglas & Nasoga 2008). As Fraenkel and Firth note, “Fiji’s problem since independence in 1970 has not been state weakness but rather the ethnic divisions created in colonial times by the British” (Fraenkel & Stewart 2007).

This background serves to suggest the scale of the task confronted by SEEP. ECREA Director Chantelle Khan sees SEEP as a strategy for people-centred development – development that “empowers people to regain control of their communities and organizations […] and make decisions that contribute to the community and organizational human development, ecological sustainability [and] economic
productivity” by focusing on restoring power and confidence to civil society (Khan 2003). SEEP takes the view that the highly structured and formal forms of authority in Fiji – in the family, village, church, school and ultimately the nation – lead to people being dependent and passive. Overcoming this Fijian “culture of silence” is seen as part of this process of change. Ordinary people are “afraid to speak up” and “do not take any initiative or responsibility themselves”. While tradition demands “an appropriate sense of obedience and respect for those in authority”, it is SEEP’s view that this culture of silence needs to be questioned (SEEP 2008).

For SEEP, being “empowered” means that people can:

• come to recognise their own dignity and value;
• realise that everyone is committed to shared values;
• gain confidence to express their opinions and influence the decisions which affect their lives;
• claim their rights as citizens;
• realise that acting in solidarity is necessary for wider change. (SEEP 2008)

Oxfam, Caritas and the Christian World Service have supported the Social Empowerment Education Program through its parent body, the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy. SEEP is opaque to some donors, who fund ECREA generically. Consequently, sources of information specifically about SEEP are limited. Oxfam prepared a case study for the AusAID Building Demand for Better Governance initiative (McErvale & McLelland 2007), using SEEP’s experience, and AusAID features SEEP in its 2007–08 Annual Performance Report under the heading, Social empowerment and education in Fiji: The AusAID-NGO Cooperation Program – supporting community capacity building and development best practice (AusAID 2008). Apart from these limited and rather superficial sources, much of the following material comes from internal SEEP reporting of retreats and training, in addition to published ECREA reports and pamphlets.

It should also be noted that the present study examines SEEP as a component program of ECREA. Consequently, the line between SEEP and ECREA sometimes blurs. For example, an ECREA pamphlet quoted above, entitled “Community Empowerment”, does not mention SEEP, but it does provide important background to SEEP’s orientation. Similarly, ECREA lists 31 “strategic partners”, among them the Bismarck Ramu Group (BRG) (Khan 2008). SEEP and BRG formed a relationship from the commencement of the SEEP paraprofessional training program in 2001. It should be
apparent that SEEP has developed in a quite different cultural and political context to the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) and BRG. The existence of this relationship between BRG and SEEP provides an opportunity to examine the adaptation of the BRG empowerment process to a novel cultural setting.

The initial SEEP training and six-month pilot was followed by a further three-year pilot phase and a five-year program-development phase. Now mature, the Board of ECREA agreed in 2009 to make the program independent of the parent body (Eagles et.al. 2004; Barcham 2009). Khan, formerly Director of ECREA, moved with SEEP as it became independent.

3.1.2  Aims and Objectives

In 2001 the SEEP Programme Advisory Committee produced a draft “Programme Guide”. It states:

Mission: Provide training in critical literacy on awareness, education and dialogue of one’s own development in face of rapid changes and global forces, centred on Christ’s teachings.

Vision: building a harmonious nation of diverse communities through participatory leadership development towards transformational personal and social change.

Between 2001 and 2007, the Programme Advisory Committee, including Lalley from BRG, Khan from ECREA, the SEEP program co-ordinator, Leo Nainoka, and another member with connections to a range of Fijian civil society organisations, continued to meet for reflection and planning. Additionally, the community facilitators did field patrols, a SEEP group spent time with BRG in Papua New Guinea, and SEEP significantly modified the BRG tools and methodology in the course of further fieldwork. Within ECREA, SEEP remained small. “Scouting” field trips to identify communities interested to work with the SEEP program had yielded a “poor response” – another way of saying progress was slow and difficult, and there were some false starts.42 However, by 2009, SEEP had successfully engaged with one tikina of six communities in the Noemalu district (Barcham 2009).

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42 At one point, SEEP sought to provide itself with a base outside Suva, as part of a rural community. Some family ties with the community facilitators led to a good deal of confusion – another example of the experience of SIDT and BRG in not having family members work in their own area.
In 2007, at the end of two three-year funding cycles, SEEP was “contributing to the ECREA vision by focusing on rural Indigenous communities working on social justice through contextual critical analysis of history and the Fijian culture” (Khan 2007). By 2007, SEEP had the following objectives:

- to strengthen ECREA’s community empowerment process and overall approach to working with communities;
- to strengthen and support a national network of community facilitators and change agents;
- to provide opportunities for community leaders to share experience, develop new knowledge and skills and address issues of mutual concern (Khan 2007).

By 2009, SEEP had identified the issues of land and leadership as two matters of mutual concern to village communities and SEEP. It was SEEP’s view that these two issues were of importance at local, district, provincial and national levels. SEEP planned its “conscientization” process to meet this need, and implemented this process in Noemalu District. In the course of the 2009 evaluation, the author toured the Noemalu district of Viti Levu with Wina Kyoga of BRG and Cema Rokodredre of SEEP. Our observations absolutely confirm the views first expressed by McErvale and McLelland: that the SEEP process can produce highly significant change. In relation to the SEEP objectives of encouraging mataqali to broaden participation in decision making, there appears to have been a fundamental shift in approach. Most noticeable is the vocal place assumed by women, who are “now permitted to present their opinions in village decision-making meetings where previously they had been entirely excluded” (McErvale & McLelland 2007). At the same time as giving people confidence in their identity by rooting them in a positive traditional narrative, the SEEP process allows leaders and led to create new social contracts, to shift responsibilities and to confirm those outcomes through traditional ritual. One example of this was the formal induction of new leadership in one community of the Noemalu district, with the SEEP paraprofessionals participating as invited guests at the ceremony (Barcham 2009). Participating communities show greater coherence and purposefulness. In 2009–10, SEEP continued to work through how to bring these issues of land and leadership, and the transformation communities have achieved, to bear on the national stage.
3.1.3 Strategies

The SEEP community development process is the result of the experience of the pilot phases of the project, combined with BRG’s experience of community engagement. SEEP Community Facilitators and other staff from SEEP have undertaken field experience in Madang Province and have attended BRG training. Khan recognised in BRG an approach to community engagement and empowerment that coincided with her own views and the philosophy of ECREA. As mentioned above, Lalley, the BRG technical adviser, has been directly involved as a SEEP facilitation trainer since 2001, and there have been a number of staff exchanges. Initially the SEEP process was based on the model of touring teams of paraprofessionals (Community Facilitators); however, SEEP’s approach continues to be modified as the program gains further experience.

Knowledge and practice of Indigenous Fijian protocol is a selection criterion for the SEEP Community Facilitators (CFs). The current CFs are of the view that this excludes Indian Fijians from at least the facilitation process in communities. However, given that SEEP was conceived and led by Khan, who is of Indian descent, there is acknowledgment that cooperation with Indian Fijians is vital to the future of Fiji (Barcham 2009). As of 2011, the community development model used by SEEP is aimed at various leadership groups – traditional, modern, church, female, youth and informal Indigenous – in the communities of a single tikina. It involves leaders and communities in a two-step process. Like BRG, the first step is engagement and trust building, including clarification of SEEP’s reasons for being in the community. Also like BRG, SEEP makes it quite clear that its involvement in the community is in no way coupled with material incentives, and that its focus is on self-reliance and community control. The second step is a critical analysis of Fijian history and community structures. SEEP refers to this as the Community Analysis Process (CAP), which is split into three components: CAP 1, CAP 2, and CAP 3. The model of engagement and analysis aims to build a participatory space where a broader range of people can express their views and negotiate solutions. Observation suggests that the individual CFs play a huge part in the process as role models (Barcham 2009). The way the team works together, the style of cooperation between men and women, the degree to which women are vocal and the level of participation in community activities are all closely observed by the community while the CFs are present. While it is probably true that this is the case in all circumstances where outsiders seek to engage
with a small community, it strikes the author as a particularly powerful cue for change in the Fijian context.

Like BRG, SEEP and the community facilitators allocate time and use their communication skills to establish a relationship with the community by listening. CFs emphasise that the community must take ownership of the issues they themselves raise, and not expect that either SEEP or the CFs will provide solutions for them. Independent community action catalysed by SEEP intervention has included: ceremonies to delegate authority or achieve reconciliation; coming to terms with inconsistency between traditional and other value systems; allowing the participation of women; renegotiating conflict between traditional and modern leaders; initiation of new development goals; and recommencement of community associations (women, youth) supported by solesolevaki (meaning working together on cooperative ventures, typically fundraising, but also a commercial kava cooperative). Community ownership has been demonstrated by communities’ willingness to themselves negotiate solutions to issues identified by them, including the often tense and conflicted issues of land and leadership.

SEEP has also made significant changes to the BRG approach, most obviously by introducing regional leaders’ meetings called Community Forums. To facilitate these gatherings, Community Facilitators use the same range of analysis tools and discussion as used within the communities. The Community Forum will be made up of both formal and informal leadership, including women and youth leaders, traditional and modern leaders, and religious leaders. The impetus to vary the BRG model and incorporate a leadership forum appears to have sprung from the particularly Fijian deference to authority (Barcham 2009). The Community Forum process provides leaders with an opportunity for discussion of community issues in a structured setting away from their families, koro and congregations. Simultaneously, SEEP community visits encourage communities to clarify the issues they need to deal with in order to achieve community aspirations, and in particular to clarify and act on the interrelated issues of land and leadership. These two approaches of forums and community visits are seen by SEEP as mutually supportive.

This is an interesting development. The original SIDT model of mobile teams, ‘paraprofessionals’, was a deliberate strategy to get education out into the context where it would be applied, so that learning and doing became one and the same thing. While this appears to make sense from a pedagogical point of view, BRG trainers have
also expressed a preference for intensive training in an environment separate from the everyday demands of the community, and SEEP has now institutionalised leadership group training as a separate activity to community “conscientization”.

In the Fijian context, bringing leaders together out of the immediate context of their community appears to be linked to the specific needs of formal and informal leaders and leadership structures as critical to change among taukei. Isolating the leaders from the led provides an opportunity for people who are often in conflict to reconsider their roles and their stake in the wellbeing of their community. It is also an expression of the confidence and fearlessness of the SEEP CFs, in deliberately bringing together people known to be in conflict over the key issues of leadership and land ownership. This is a substantial move on from the SIDT approach of using integration of “the project” or “appropriate technology” with quality of life as an indirect means to generate reflection. Here, participants are invited to use a structured, neutral setting to get straight to the heart of the matter of resolving conflicts over their most difficult issues.

3.1.4 Tools and Methodologies

Looking to the SEEP graphic tools, it is reflection on the internal dynamics of country and community that stands out. Tools used by the Community Facilitators include new graphics, such as “Above and Below the Table” (Appendix 9), and “codes”, such as the “Theatre of the Oppressed” (Figure 7). Other SIDT inspired graphics have survived transfer to a new environment. The “Question Man”, originally derived from Galtung’s social cosmology, is remarkable for its demonstrated durability and flexibility of application. SEEP’s emphasis on civil society is evident, by way of contrast with SIDT and BRG. The conservation message is absent, with no images such as “Ha-Ha Richer”, and less direct concern with village assessment as in the Village Quality of Life Index. However, in terms of the work schedules of the paraprofessionals, there are many similarities with the BRG process. The work of the Community Facilitators includes briefing and debriefing, the community entry process (called “scouting”), the use of community mapping, presentations, and small and plenary discussion in the context of several extended visits. In addition, training forums are held outside of communities at a neutral location.

Of particular interest to the present study is the intensive use of the SEEP Timeline. While conceptually similar to the BRG model, the Timeline has had the content entirely reconstructed for use in an Indigenous Fijian context (Douglas & Nasoga 2008). The content is reinforced and supported by visits to the Fiji Museum during the
Community Forums. The following rendition of a sample of the Timeline content is based largely on the “Timeline” DVD produced by ECREA. “Timeline” provides a critical analysis of Fijian history from an Indigenous perspective. It begins by presenting a debate about the origins of taukei, exploring an Indigenous Fijian identity. It uses all the devices of drama and setting to propose an evidence-based narrative of Indigenous Fijian identity and society. Much of the early part of the DVD is devoted to the evidence of the Lapita migration. In order to convey what a radically different perspective the Timeline brings to taukei, it is necessary to tell a little of the story.

The Lapita culture is the name given to the artefactual remains associated with the people who settled the area east of the Solomon Islands, called Remote Oceania, between 3400 and 2900 years ago. The earliest Lapita sites were found in the Bismarck islands. Within 400 years the Lapita had spread over an area of 3400 kilometres, stretching through the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, and eastward to Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. Located on small islands and the coasts of larger islands, and separated from one another by as much as 350 kilometres, the Lapita lived in villages of stilt-legged houses. They made earth-ovens and distinctive pottery, they fished and exploited marine and aquacultural resources, they raised domestic chickens, pigs and dogs, and they grew fruit- and nut-bearing trees (Hirst 2009). They also maintained fleets of ocean-going catamarans and possessed exceptional navigational skills.

Cannibalism was actively practised at the time that Christian missionaries arrived in Fiji, and was assumed by them to have been a constant of Indigenous culture. This myth was perpetuated by a story based on oral histories that was published in 1892 in the Fijian newspaper Na Mata (Douglas & Nasoga 2008). The story, the result of an essay competition run by missionaries, tells of migration from Africa in the canoe Kaunitoni by Lutunasobasoba and his kin. This story subsequently gained great

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43 Directed by Scott Douglas, written by Scott Douglas and Isikeli Nasoga (RIP), and narrated by Isikeli Nasoga (with English subtitles).
44 Facilitators in the community setting do not use the DVD. When in a community, the facilitator enacts the narrative using photographs pegged to a line.
currency among Indigenous Fijians. Apparently unfamiliar with Na Mata, early anthropologists also helped to perpetuate the story, seemingly unaware of its origin (Raven-Hart 1956). There is no physical evidence of this migration; however, there are families who claim ancestry to Lutunasobasoba today. Their genealogies suggest an arrival around 1400AD. The latest estimate of the arrival of the Lapita people is 1200BC (Douglas & Nasoga 2008). Some histories record that Lutunasobasoba saw smoke, further suggesting prior occupation (Wright 1986).

The pottery remains of the Lapita migration at the Bourewa archeological dig, near Labasa on the island of Vanua Levu, show intricate design and artisanship. Jewellery and ornaments were worn. One shard shows skirted women joining hands in a line, perhaps dancing. Ledua Traill Kuilanisautuba, a Research Assistant with the University of the South Pacific at the Bourewa dig, provides much of the commentary on the Lapita artefacts. As the camera lingers on her features, it is clear that she bears a remarkable resemblance to a Lapita woman whose face was reconstructed from remains found at the dig. This reconstruction appears simultaneously in the camera’s frame. Nasoga speculates that from the evidence it would appear that the early Fijian lifestyle was inconsistent with war and cannibalism. He attributes the change to conflict, along with the change to the rigid authority structures and divisions of labour that remain part of contemporary Fijian culture, to a changing climate that put pressure on limited natural resources, bringing clans into conflict. The clear implication is that taukei have a great deal to be proud of in embracing their heritage, and that the rejection of a cannibal past brought on by acceptance of Christianity need not imply a complete rejection of taukei culture, as many seem to believe.

The SEEP “Timeline” DVD graphically explores this and many other important historical themes, from colonisation and the legal recognition of the Great Council of Chiefs, to the economy and labour relations, Independence and the 1987 coup. The narrative challenges contemporary beliefs about national identity at the same time as nurturing a positive, alternative narrative that resonates with taukei consciousness.

3.2 Part II: Analysis – Community Psychology

3.2.1 Narrative and Empowerment

The SEEP process has been informed by a combination of intellectual analysis, community engagement experience and Fijian knowledgeability. SEEP deliberately
takes people onto socially risky ground, questioning beliefs about the past and asking people to confront and resolve tensions and conflicts over the central issues of land ownership and leadership in communities. In these things it has been successful, producing significant change at the scale of whole communities.

In village life on Viti Levu, adherence to a hierarchy of authority can lock communities in indecision and uncertainty if senior leaders are absent in towns for long periods. SEEP has successfully mediated leadership transition in such communities. The strong presence of women in meetings held over kava is modelled by SEEP trainers. The effect on the many women present\textsuperscript{45} was to strengthen their participation in decision making about leadership. Sister Emi Frances Oh, a member of the SEEP Program Advisory Committee, commenting on the Timeline history narrative used by the Community Facilitators, says:

I believe that people are tired of this coup culture and its different faces and expressions in the power struggles for domination, the cycle of violence and the abuse of human rights […] and how these impact on the lives of ordinary Fiji citizens […] Fiji is stuck in an impasse right now and one way out of this is through creating a new narrative out of which people can start re-envisioning a desired future and how to move forward. [The Timeline] is a story that is credible and authentic […] The story is life-giving, that it can capture the imagination of the Fijian people as a nation … and to value our differences and diversity rather than demonizing them (Oh 2009).

The striking imagery of the SEEP Timeline indeed weaves “a story that is credible and authentic”. The external evaluations of SEEP (Eagles et.al. 2004; McErvale & McLelland 2007; Barcham 2009) show evidence of the success of the program, suggesting the important part the Timeline story has played in the change that has occurred in communities.

This transformative character of narrative is a concept developed by Julian Rappaport. In 1986, Rappaport received the Award for Distinguished Contributions to Community Psychology and Community Mental Health from the Community Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association at its annual conference. To appreciate Rappaport’s use of narrative, it is necessary first to introduce the field of community psychology. In his 1987 paper \textit{Terms of Empowerment/Exemplars of Prevention}, based\textsuperscript{45} Unusual in itself in the kava hut.
on the paper he gave at the 1986 conference, Rappaport suggested that an “ecological theory” is needed to guide research in the field of community psychology. While the notion of an “ecological theory” sounds vastly complex, what Rappaport is proposing is relatively modest in scope in comparison to the use of the term in the biological sciences. First, since the field of community psychology is by definition about groups, the field requires perspectives that can be “an antidote […] to the one-sidedness of person-centred programs” typical of the individualised approach of clinical psychology (Rappaport 1987:135). Secondly, community psychology needs to be concerned with the “environment” of the group, its historical and cultural context, and community “settings”. Thirdly, community psychology needs to invite research on “organizational processes, citizen participation, change in general and social change in particular, networks, social skills, and the psychological sense of community” (Rappaport 1987:135). As a consequence, Rappaport argues that empowerment should be accepted as the central “phenomenon of interest” for community psychology, along with the exemplar of prevention. This is because empowerment suggests both individual determination over one’s own life and democratic participation in the life of one’s community, often through mediating structures such as schools, neighbourhoods, churches, and other voluntary organizations. Empowerment conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights. It is a multilevel construct applicable to individual citizens as well as to organizations and neighbourhoods; it suggests the study of people in context (Rappaport 1987:121).

The influence of Rappaport’s 1987 paper remains visible in 2007, when, in a special issue of the *American Journal of Community Psychology* devoted to collaborative action and organisation, Boyd and Angelique state that “community psychologists study such things as empowerment, ecological analysis, sense of community, diversity, and prevention” (Boyd & Angelique 2007).

Half-way in time between these two publications, in 1995, Douglas Perkins and Marc Zimmerman co-edited another special edition of the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. The lead essay, “Empowerment Theory, Research and Application” (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995), canvases 10 years of progress in the field. Perkins and Zimmerman refer to the phenomenon of empowerment having “evolved from the new, paradigm-challenging concept to become itself highly popular and mainstream”
(Perkins & Zimmerman 1995:571). In common with the present study, they identify that popular adoption of empowerment has led to “casual usage” of the term, which is “often inadequately conceptualized and loosely defined” (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995:572).

Since Rappaport in 1987, in the field of community psychology, empowerment has been described as a “multi-level construct”. Zimmerman describes these levels as:

- **Personal:** perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment;
- **Organisational:** processes and structures that enhance members’ skills and provide them with the mutual support necessary to effect community level change;
- **Communal:** individuals working together in an organized fashion to improve their collective lives and linkages among community organizations and agencies that help maintain that quality of life (Zimmerman 1995:581–2).

The persistence of this view does not appear attributable to empirical evidence, which has been hard to develop given that “as a practical matter not all research can be at every level of analysis” (Rappaport 1987:139). As recently as Boyd and Angeline (2007) there is the call to develop an interdisciplinary dialogue between community psychology and organisational studies as a means to bring these two disciplines together. More likely, it seems that the persistence of this view is attributable to Rappaport’s warning of 10 years earlier, that “for psychologists the largest danger is that we will limit ourselves to the study of individuals” (Rappaport 1987:139), a tendency to be avoided if the field was to achieve the kind of Khunian paradigm-shift that he envisaged. Similarly, measurement of the “open-ended construct” of empowerment has been regarded as undesirable because it is seen as context-dependent, and therefore “theoretically inconsistent with the construct given the specific demands and characteristics of different settings and life situations” (Zimmerman 1995:596).

The difficulty faced by community psychologists in overcoming these practical and theoretical issues persists in Zimmerman’s 1995 article, “Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations”, which restricts itself to elucidation of the concept of psychological empowerment, called “PE”, as an individual phenomenon.
The empirical evidence for this individual level cited by Zimmerman supports the conclusion that PE is “expected to include a sense of and motivation to control; decision-making and problem-solving skills and a critical awareness of one’s sociopolitical environment; and participatory behaviors”, demonstrating the “intrapersonal”, “interpersonal” and “behavioural” aspects to individual empowerment (Zimmerman 1995:588). It can readily be seen that these aspects – for example, participatory behaviour – rely on interaction with other “levels” of empowerment for their efficacy. Zimmerman finds himself lacking a theoretical perspective able to address important questions such as: “How [do] the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components interact to form PE? How do these three components relate to one another? Are some components of PE contingent upon others?” (Zimmerman 1995:590).

Rappaport introduces narrative as a means to respond to these questions. Zimmerman states that critical awareness “refers to one’s understanding of the resources needed to achieve a desired goal, knowledge of how to acquire those resources, and skills for managing resources once they are obtained” (Zimmerman 1995: 589). Rappaport proposes that narratives can be regarded as a resource that supports empowerment at all levels: “stories and storytelling are useful concepts for a cognitive psychology that spans different levels of analysis” (Mankowski & Rappaport 1995). Rappaport is empirically confident of his ground. He states that “there is a great deal of evidence to show that narratives create meaning, emotion, memory and identity” (Rappaport 1995). He refers to a body of literature pointing to community narratives as a powerful force for both personal and social change, and that helping people to identify, create, and tell their own stories, individually and collectively, is an endeavour consistent with the development of empowerment” (Rappaport 1995:802).

Recalling feminist authors, Rappaport emphasises the importance of people giving voice to their stories to generate empowerment through a “collective narrative that sustains their own personal life story in positive ways” (Rappaport 1995:796). For example, depending on the narrative, a person can define himself or herself as an alcoholic hopelessly drifting through existence, or as a survivor struggling to deal with life in the only way that seems viable. From a practical point of view, Rappaport sees the value in creating “new settings that may serve a legitimating function for people to tell their own stories” (Rappaport 1995:799).
Rappaport’s proposal has clear resonance with Habermas. If narrative gives meaning to “emotion, memory and identity”, it is possible to equate narrative with lifeworld, and thus see more clearly the relationship between lifeworld and individual psychology, and the way in which these generate meaning in the interaction known as “communicative action”. Indeed, Habermas identifies narrative as “a special form of […] speech” in which actors base their communication on “a lay concept of the world, in the sense of the everyday world or lifeworld” (Habermas 1984:136). Telling one’s story, and hearing it told back in the stories of others, serves the function of objectification. This permits empowerment through the new setting being based on individual contributions of content, making the lifeworld thematic and the setting socially autonomous, as discussed in the previous chapter. Rappaport seeks to understand the “illusie [sic] and interesting” concept of a “psychological sense of community” through “shared narrative” (Rappaport 1995:803 – footnote). This shared community story is conveyed through social interaction, texts, pictures, performances and rituals. The setting for this story telling can be, and often is, an organised group.46 In the particular mental health context of Rappaport, “mutual help organisations” can be a setting where “a new community narrative is formed” (Rappaport 1995:804). Reflecting on other papers in the 1995 special edition of the American Journal of Community Psychology, Rappaport, in a similar vein to the present author, observes that

many of the same mechanisms are observed when the various researchers look for empowerment in successful voluntary service organizations, mutual help groups, religious congregations, educational programs, community coalitions or partnerships, business and community organizations, or agricultural cooperatives (Rappaport 1995:799).

Rappaport reasons that if “the process of identity development and change is hypothesised to be similar for all people”, then narratives generate personal outcomes: “people with negative social identities are not individually different (read blameworthy) than those with positive social identities” (Rappaport 1995:804). In so saying, Rappaport confirms that gaining an empowered identity through narrative is a phenomenon of structures and relationships rather than a quality of actors. In terms of actors, Mankowski and Rappaport state that “stories are created by people, and in turn,

46 In support of this present study, Rappaport comments, “when empowering organisations already exist we can learn a great deal about empowerment by collaborating with them to learn about and help them spread their story” (Rappaport 1995:800).
create us” (Mankowski & Rappaport 1995:216). This confirms the dialectical relationship between personal and social narratives. If, as Mankowski and Rappaport suggest, “the self is a knowledge structure and knowledge is stories, [then] the self is stories” (Mankowski & Rappaport 1995:215).

These reciprocal relationships between individual stories and community narratives can be characterised as dialogic. [...] Social knowledge constitutes the forms in which individual knowledge is created, while individuals also contribute to the revision of community narratives (Mankowski & Rappaport 1995:216).

Mankowski and Rappaport propose that individuals “create, enact and maintain their personal identity” through the “mapping” of social narratives, or “story skeletons”, onto their own story (Mankowski & Rappaport 1995:215). In circumstances where an individual has experiences that cannot be readily mapped onto remembered social narratives, that person may seek out “alternative frameworks within which such experiences can be integrated into a coherent and whole personal story” (Mankowski & Rappaport 1995:215).

From the point of view of community psychology, Rappaport affirms the perspectives on empowerment generated by the case studies in this and preceding chapters. What has been achieved so far in the present study is to understand these mechanisms in terms of communicative action. This has some implications for the approaches used in community psychology, stemming from the power aspect of empowerment. While Rappaport acknowledges that research on empowerment and narrative is being done in the fields of “anthropology, sociology, linguistics and literature, cultural studies, discourse analysis, cognitive psychology, and social cognition” (Rappaport 1995:801), he and his colleagues have not adopted the analysis of power inherent in discourse, communicative action and reflexive community that is recognised in these other disciplines. Social narratives serve to preserve the status quo, providing the common “skeleton” as the referent for personal identity formation. As occurs in circumstances where social outcomes produce a disparity of power between actors – that is, some are empowered by the narrative, and some disempowered or marginalised by the same narrative – then it would seem, as Habermas proposes, that a new “coherent and whole” narrative must be presupposed by the specific experience of “emancipation by means of critical insight into relationships of power” (Habermas 1974). This is some
distance from Zimmerman’s Northern conception of “critical awareness”. 47 Rappaport confirms, however, that a group with a structure is a necessary part of developing alternative narratives that tell the members of a group “something about themselves, their heroes, their history, and their future” (Rappaport 1995:803). 

Applying Rappaport’s analysis to the SEEP Timeline, it can be seen as providing an alternative narrative, a “skeleton” onto which Indigenous Fijians are able to map a personal and community narrative that is coherent, whole, and their own, as opposed to the imported narratives of Christianity, colonialism and democracy. History is used as a tool by SEEP because “things that happened to our ancestors define what happens to us today; history asks questions about why things happened the way they happened in our country” (Douglas & Nasoga 2008). As Khan explains, “history can be very empowering, depending on how you tell it” (Douglas & Nasoga 2008). The Timeline is an evidence-based narrative that places Indigenous Fijians at the centre of their own development, not as innately cannibalistic and failing actors who must deny their past, but as a people engaged in dealing effectively with changes in their natural, social, and political environments over millennia.

SEEP makes use of this narrative in its engagement with taueki communities on issues of land ownership and leadership. As indicated above, by proposing that SEEP has the aim of supporting taueki to “regain control of their communities and organizations”, it is seeking to influence the political environment in Fiji in favour of “social justice”, and a society that can move beyond racial discrimination to build a democratic national identity. While something like this may be a tacit goal of SIDT or BRG, here, in the Fijian context, it is overt. For this reason, the next section goes on to examine the context in which the SEEP narrative is employed: as a means to reconstruct a Fijian sense of civil society as an antidote to “coup culture”.

47 Zimmerman states, “the conceptualization of PE that is presented is rooted firmly in a social action framework that includes community change, capacity building, and collectivity. Social change, however, may take many forms and may not necessarily result in a power struggle” (Zimmerman 1995:582).

48 At the same reference, Rappaport writes, “A community narrative is a story that is common among a group of people. It may be shared by the group through social interaction, texts (although texts are not necessary), and other forms of communication including pictures, performances, and rituals”. This is the meaning intended here by structure in a group, that of organised performance.
3.2.2 A Place in Civil Society

As seen above, the term “civil society” has been used by ECREA and SEEP since their inception. A thorough exploration of Fiji’s “coup culture” and the effect this has on the meaning of civil society and the limits to action it imposes is beyond the scope of the present study. However, any consideration of civil society in Fiji cannot ignore the coup phenomenon. ECREA demonstrated its position in Fijian civil society in its response to the 2006 coup, the so-called “good governance coup” that held promise to “supersede the politics of race by military force, and then to selectively engage the previous protagonists in a nation-building project” (Fraenkel & Stewart 2007:5). Titled ‘Time of uncertainty, opportunity’, ECREA’s public position at that time included the view that

it seems regrettable that those who have condemned the military takeover seem obsessed with the "violation of democracy" perspective and fail to recognise the "anti-racist" and "pro-people" aspects of the takeover which could be termed the "social justice" perspective (Fiji Times 16/12/2006).

The Fiji Council of Churches and Assembly of Christian Churches had put out a statement supporting the democratically elected government and leadership of Laisenia Qarase, stating that “we do not recognise and support Commodore Bainamarama’s interim government because it is illegal and unconstitutional” (Staff 2006). As Fraenkel (2007) comments, “the 2006 coup divided civil society organizations, judges, academics and politicians, as well as, more broadly, triggering an unfamiliar ethnic realignment […] The paradoxes and contradictions of the 2006 coup outdo anything in Fiji’s modern history” (Frankel 2007:6–8). In the same volume, Mahendra Chaudhry states: “Fiji’s intelligentsia – be they academics, politicians, clerics, the legal fraternity or the suddenly vocal human rights activists – have been deeply divided by the events of 5 December 2006 and the best way forward for the nation” (Chaudhry 2007:343).

For ECREA, its social justice mission anchored its decision to not reject Commodore Bainamarama. Many saw the crux of the issue in Fiji as Qarase-style “democracy” versus good governance, equity and social justice (Chaudhry 2007). There appears to have been a widespread and debilitating withdrawal of civil consent as a result of the effect on governance of the Qarase government. Subsequently, this has meant finding

49 Searches by the author suggest that civil society in the Pacific is an understudied area, with the notable exception of work at the Australian National University. Study of Fiji and narratives of Indigenous culture and political control that explore the scope and role of civil society in an environment of coups and/or military control could occupy a thesis in its own right.
ways to work with the reality of military rule by Commodore Bainamarama, a reality that has proved to be persistent. ECREA has played an active part in generating debate about “the best way forward”, maintaining principled relationships with other civil society players and the state, expressing its views through engagement.

What is demonstrated here is that once again, organisationally, an empowerment agenda is teleological, in this instance driven by the end of “social justice”; it involves dissent, in as much as ECREA asserted its autonomy in isolating itself from mainstream opinion in making the decision not to condemn the 2006 coup; and it involves risk, in that ECREA and SEEP funding sources were threatened by the stand that was taken, and equally, support for a stand in favour of civil society in the context of military action had unknown future consequences.

ECREA also expressed these principles in its community programs. In an early SEEP discussion paper, former ECREA Director, Chantelle Khan, (Khan 2003) talks about the role of SEEP in terms of changing power and service provision relationships between the state, the private sector, and civil society. Khan gives her analysis of contemporary Fijian society in a paper entitled “Some Pointers for SEEP”. In her assessment,

civil society began to lose its function as the guardian and promoter of social justice, and the primary vehicle by which people articulate, define and suggest remedies to their issues of concern […] The days where these issues are discussed at the village level and where solutions are proposed are declining. Today civil society is more and more dependent on the State, business, and outside consultancy to define their concerns and what they need to resolve the issue (Khan 2003).

Here, as well as being a “promoter of social justice”, civil society is “the primary vehicle” through which people participate, and includes “the village level”. Civil society is placed in a dependent relationship with the “state, business and outside consultancy”, one that requires an autonomous response from village communities to reverse the decline in local problem-solving institutions. Following the 2006 coup, this need has become more pressing. Brij Lal identifies the vacuum left by the “paralysis” of the “traditional bastions of [Indigenous] Fijian establishment” – the Methodist

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50 Cooperation can be a productive course. Leo Nainoka of SEEP began a press campaign on behalf of the people of Noemalu tikina, whose only transport is ponies. The campaign resulted in a delegation of the tikina leaders meeting in the Commodore’s office, securing an undertaking to construct road access, and an interim grant of 100 beasts.
Church and the Great Council of Chiefs – as responsible for the fact that “no clear-cut pattern of response [to the 2006 coup] has emerged from the Fijian\(^{51}\) community” (Lal 2007). The reinvention of locally autonomous institutions is necessary to civil society because “democracy cannot be achieved rapidly or sustained unless it is built on sound legal, institutional and cultural foundations” (Chaudhry 2007).

In order to understand the process of SEEP working with taueki communities in order to create the “cultural foundations” for democracy through empowerment, it is necessary to examine more closely the relationship between coup d’état, civil society and democratisation. Experience in the field comes from Latin America. Latin American parallels with the Fijian experience of the Qarase government include states in decay through “corruption, incompetence, and neglect of the electorate’s basic needs” (Encarnacion 2002). Also shared with Fiji is the significant role played by the church in support of democratisation (Karl 1990).

The experience of Latin America suggests that military coup is a transitory stage (Karl 1990:6). In this period of transition, the terms of civil society are subject to the limits of the institutional prerogatives assumed by the military. Such prerogatives are those areas where, whether challenged or not, the military as an institution assumes they have an acquired right or privilege, formal or informal, to exercise effective control over its [own] internal governance, [and so] to play a role within extra-military areas within the state apparatus, or even to structure relationships between the state and political or civil society (Stepan 1988).

The clear determination and limitation of the appropriate extent of military power is a measure of civilian control. In the circumstances of coup d’état, civil society becomes only that which is “extra-military”. In the Fijian context, “politicians” appear for the present as players in civil society in contrast to the military rule of the State.\(^{52}\) Where there are no “predictable rules of the game” (Karl 1990:6), the boundaries and functions of civil society are broad at the same time as being subject to “structured contingency” (Karl 1990:5). Observing day-to-day life in Suva, the stark reality of that structured contingency appears on the streets as armed men in uniform, and public buildings occupied as barracks.

\(^{51}\) Lal consistently refers to Indigenous “Fijians” as distinct from “Indo-Fijians”.

\(^{52}\) Commodore Bainimarama has indeed asserted, “I am not a politician” (Fiji Times, 6 Dec 2006).
So, it is evident that the military context significantly changes the operation of civil society. Janet Hunt (2008), in her study of civil society organisations in East Timor, draws the same conclusion. Hunt begins by drawing on current development literature to outline three perceived roles for the non-government organisation as a component of a broader civil society. This literature views these organisations as:

- having a democratising role in relation to the state, and a means of making states accountable to their citizens;
- emphasising civil society as contributing social capital through the participation of people in voluntary associations;
- contributing to peace, conflict resolution and human rights (Hunt 2008).

The objectives of ECREA and SEEP are clearly consistent with these goals. However, as Hunt found in East Timor, under conditions of conflict “the idea that civil society should act as a countervailing force to the government, or a mechanism to make it accountable, [is] not particularly useful”. A similar conclusion can be reached under conditions of coup d’état. The scope of praxis is limited under military rule. Hunt proposes that

an alternative approach which may be more helpful to frame thinking in such contexts is an adapted Gramscian one, in which post-conflict development is seen as an ideological struggle within elites of both civil and political society, less about capitalist domination, than about the entrenchment of human rights and values of non-violence within a state and society (Hunt 2008:293).

ECREA’s record suggests that there is indeed an “ideological struggle” going on in Fiji to entrench human rights and democratic values as part of “the rules of the game”. In terms of SEEP’s process, based on an historical narrative, there is a conscious strategy to empower taukei to organize autonomously, revitalising the village component of civil society as a means to delegitimise “coup culture”.

In order to grasp the significance of the SEEP process as a means to achieve social change in Fiji, it is worthwhile to take Gramsci as a starting point. Gramsci (Gramsci 1971) led Marxists away from the focus on economy to the viewpoint of social reproduction based in cultural and ideological struggle. The subsequent praxis in Eastern Europe and Latin America was founded on “self organisation and civic autonomy”, and “the creation of independent spaces, in which individuals can act
according to their consciences” (Kaldor 2003). Naturally, this view once again recalls Habermas’s communicative action.

Habermas has this to say about civil society:

its institutional core comprises those non-governmental and non-economic connections and voluntary associations that anchor the communication structures of the public sphere in the society component of the lifeworld. Civil society is composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organisations, and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in private life spheres, distil and transmit such reaction to the public sphere (Habermas, quoted in Ehrenberg 1999:222).

Habermas abandons “holistic aspirations to a self-organising society”, be they the aspirations of Rousseau or Marx.53 “Civil society can transform only itself, and it can have at most an indirect effect on the self-transformation of the political system” (Ehrenberg 1999:223). This appears particularly stark in circumstances where the political system has been usurped by the military. Civil society may influence the military, but it is the nature of military authority under conditions of coup d’état that the military can only change itself. As a consequence, it should not be expected that SEEP will demonstrate the kind of vertical integration of activism seen in BRG, or the attempt to integrate “local organisations and structures at the centre of government” as described by Freidmann.

Instead, the internal transformation of civil society is possible because it is the “territory of mediation” between the family and the state, Hegel’s Burgerliche Gesellschaft (Kaldor 2003:27). In contemporary usage, adopting Habermas’s classifications and dialectical orientation, and recalling also the feminist perspectives discussed earlier, civil society is “a sphere of interaction […] composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary organisations), social movements and forms of public communication” (Kaldor 2003:45).

Here is visible the convergence of diverse perspectives. First, this description corresponds to the terms used by Zimmerman in community psychology to describe that “phenomenon of central interest”, empowerment, and the three levels making up this “multi-level construct”. However, what Kaldor has added to this view is that these

53 Or John Wesley, for that matter.
three levels – or in this case “spheres” – in fact compose one “sphere of interaction” she terms “civil society”. Finally, Habermas once again brings these elements together from a theoretical point of view, in defining that sphere of interaction as the field of communicative action. This brings us to a theoretical position beyond competing ideologies as a way to describe the SEEP process in taukei communities. The empowerment process can be seen to work through a narrative “attuned to how societal problems resonate in private life spheres”, at a time when taukei perceive that “the present age is one of decline, in which former power relations are being reconfigured” (Tomlinson 2011:167).

3.2.3 Partnership with Christianity

One of the themes of the previous two chapters has been to make overt the “philosophy” that underlies the use of empowerment as a program strategy and organising principle. From the beginning of this chapter it has been apparent that Christian values and institutions play a very significant part in ECREA and SEEP. While the Board of ECREA and the staff of the organisation are racially mixed, they share the belief that “the love, mercy and grace of God are revealed in Jesus Christ”. At the 2001 SEEP Training at Nadave, Viti Levu, the topic of “Community Analysis” starts with a talk about “Christianity and its impact on Fiji”, and small-group discussion on the difference between Christianity and Church. Christian research networks have been extensively used in the development of SEEP material. This Christian orientation is a significant contrast to BRG literature, which has grown from the conservation language of the ICAD, and that of SIDT, which retains an international development orientation.

In terms of where SEEP draws this philosophy, Vatican II era Catholic theology (as interpreted in the Catholic social justice literature), and the “liberation theology” of Gustavo Gutiérrez (1971), coupled with the contemporaneous and ecumenical work of Freire, are direct and apparent influences on SEEP. SEEP literature affirms “the values of Christianity, and the creative and transforming character of God” (Khan 2003). Literature produced by Khan and SEEP is steeped in the language of Freire. The use of “conscientization”, “codes”, “critical literacy”, “culture of silence” and “dialogue” all derive from Freire’s process of “cultural action for freedom”. Above a door in the SEEP house is the following quote, attributed to Freire: “Trust is established by dialogue: it cannot exist if the words of both parties do not coincide with their actions.”
The work of Paulo Freire has been touched on in previous chapters. The tools and methodologies created by Freire have been highly influential in the field of international development, and in adult pedagogy. A review of theoretical approaches to empowerment would not be complete without some examination of Freire’s contribution. His work was highly influential throughout the 1970s, initially in South America and later in Africa, in Nyerere’s Tanzania. Later still, his approach became influential in Europe, where it was often identified with Ivan Illich and the “deschooling” of society (Freire 1977). In translation from the original Portuguese, and heavily laden with Marxist revolutionary polemics, interpretation of Freire’s work is fraught with difficulty. Born of devout Catholic parents, Freire often worked through Christian organisations, and spent some of his career as special educational adviser to the World Council of Churches.

It is Freire who forges a partnership between a moral world of faith, and Hegelian humanism. Following Hegel, for Freire, liberty requires “staking one’s life” – meaning the security of mythologised and irrational “false” reality – in exchange for the “independent self-consciousness” required “to transform concrete, objective reality”. On dissent, Freire affirms that critical consciousness leads to the expression of social discontent, “precisely because these discontents are real components of the oppressive situation” (Freire 1996).54

For Freire, this acquisition of liberty takes place through dialogue, “the encounter between men [and women], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (Freire 1996:69). As a member of the revolutionary avant-garde, Freire’s defining concern with dialogue was to engage with the people in their struggle against oppression (Freire 1977). In his work, the validity claim to subjective sincerity appears as existential “love”, and “faith in humankind”. “If I do not love the world – if I do not love life – if I do not love the people – I cannot enter into dialogue” (Freire 1996). Like Scott Lash from the previous chapter, Freire proposes an ontological basis for dialogue. Dialogue is an “existential necessity” for people to “achieve significance as human beings”. On that foundation, this existential necessity cannot exist without “critical thinking”, which “constantly immerses itself in temporality” (Freire 1996).

3.2.4 Freire’s pedagogy

The broader acceptance of Freire’s work as a curriculum method in Europe comes from his pursuit of literacy as a structured program. In the program, “codes” are chosen to “problematicise the existential situation” of learners. The codes are based on 17 “generative words” chosen by specialists following “preliminary investigation” of the linguistic universe of the learners. To some degree, this suggests what BRG or SEEP might call “community entry”, or “listening for community themes”. Generative words must be:

- of pragmatic value to learners, commanding common understanding;
- graded for phonetic difficulty;
- tri-syllabic to allow immediate experimentation by learners with various sound combinations (Freire 1970).

In-session discussion in learning these generative words is supported by discussion groups, the circulo de cultura. Beyond this kind of specificity, Freire’s critique of adult classroom texts using linguistic contexts not of the learner’s world also has relevance beyond a revolutionary context. Such texts, “when mechanically memorised and repeated, are deprived of their authentic dimension as thought-language in dynamic interplay with reality. Thus impoverished, they are not authentic expressions of the world” (Freire 1970:10). Literacy grows in the “difficult apprenticeship” of the person learning to name his world. In “liberating education”, the relationship between teacher and learner must be one where the “educator” does not provide the content. This comes from the “educatee”, who mediates this content to create knowledge of the world in naming it (Freire 1977). All persons in a learning group reflect critically on a text, or “codification”, which represents a “real existent” or one constructed by the learners, as in the codes used by SEEP community facilitators.

Decodification is a two-step process. The first stage of decodification is taxonomic dissection of the “surface structure” of the code: “readers […] focus on the relationship between the categories constituting the codification”. The next step, comprehending the “deep structure”, or “object-action whole” suggested by the unification of the categories in the code, is to problematicise the codified situation (Freire 1970:14). This recalls Giddens from Chapter 2. For Freire, problematising gives meaning to the dialectic between the relational categories, and is, in his view, the foundation of literacy.
Like the dialectic of Habermas discussed in Chapter 2, codification mediates between “concrete and theoretical contexts (of reality)” at the same time as mediating between “knowing subjects, educators and learners” (Freire 1970:14). In Freire, Habermas’s objectification of society is quite literally a photograph, sketch or slide, which for the co-learners effects “an operation basic to the act of knowing: they gain distance from the knowable object” (Freire 1970:15). Gaining objectivity begins the process of “conscientization”, the process in which persons as knowing subjects come to the realisation that their life is determined, and through this knowledge appreciate their capability to transform that reality. Says Freire, “only beings who can reflect upon the fact that they are determined are capable of freeing themselves” (Freire 1970:28).

For Freire, conscientization implies a transition from one mode of consciousness to another. These modes of consciousness, “semi-intransitive” and “naïve transitive”, correspond to particular “historical-cultural” configurations (Freire 1970:32). Semi-intransitive consciousness coexists with the configuration of the “culture of silence”, which is a phenomenon of the “closed society” – a relic of colonialism and the time when “the culture of silence took shape” (Freire 1970:35). In common with the authors in Chapters 2 and 3, Freire recognises that de facto consent by silence is not driven by actors, but is “the result of the structural relations between the dominated and the dominators”, hence the naming of the mode of consciousness as semi-intransitive (Freire 1970:33). The other half of the dialectic is the consciously acting subject, for whom “silence is no longer seen as an unalterable given, but as the result of a reality that can and must be transformed” (Freire 1970:38).

Freire’s pedagogy is first person-centred, based as it is around the “conscious body” that is not “a mere copy of objectivity” (Freire 1977). His analysis of popular action as a collective endeavour is founded on the transformative capacity of work, in the sense of consciously directed effort. Through work on the world, “consciousness is in turn historically and culturally conditioned through the ‘inversion of praxis’” (Freire 1970:32), the process of action and reflection, world=work=praxis. Within a framework of cultural action for freedom “in opposition to the dominating power elite” (Freire 1970:51), and cultural revolution “in harmony with the revolutionary regime”, as in China where “history is made by human beings” (Freire 1977), Freire’s praxis always has the goal of revolution, with its concomitant use of “popular” emergence of consciousness among “the masses”. This interpretation clouds the relationship between individuals and collectives in terms of social action beyond pedagogy. Freire does not
propose “1000s of schools for revolution” (Freire 1977) but seeks the engagement of the avant-garde as drivers of social change with the people in their “historical-cultural” struggle. What is clear is that codification is a method that teaches literacy that is “to make history; […] to read history (and not just the newspapers)”. Once people “get history in their hands, they discover the meaning of future, and then the people get hope” (Freire 1977). Here Freire’s pedagogy meets Rappaport’s community psychology. The code is one point in the narrative of a people’s history, a narrative that necessarily informs the literal meaning of the generative word.

From its commencement, SEEP has sought to go straight to the heart of the matter for Indigenous Fijians in emphasising social justice and political engagement. What is entirely evident from Freire’s methodology is that if people are not part of the process of defining their problems and developing solutions, if they are not providing the content of the development discussion, failure occurs because there is a lack of consistency between

the problem, the background, and what people actually experience […]

The defining process does not allow people to look beyond their immediate concern, nor allow ample space to talk about the background, their feelings and views of what the problem is and how it could be solved […] The present process of defining issues and solutions disempowers people in that they are not part of the (problem) defining / solution (finding) process (Khan 2003).

SEEP courageously provides means for Indigenous Fijians to reflect on their internal state of affairs – as Khan says, by “contextual critical analysis of history and the Fijian culture” (Douglas & Nasoga 2008) – in precisely the way that Freire would have admired.

3.3 Summary

SEEP’s critical analysis of history and the Fijian culture as portrayed in the Timeline actively proposes an alternative narrative of Indigenous Fijian history and culture – a narrative of growth, change and adaption to the environment. The evidence suggests that reflection on this narrative has had a significant effect in communities. The SEEP group carefully models Freire’s action-reflection process as a guide to their praxis. In so doing, the group has reconstructed the BRG operational model to work in an Indigenous Fijian social environment, having rebuilt the knowledge base that informs the process. SEEP has substantially demonstrated that the organisational and
community process developed by the Bismarck Ramu Group is transferrable when there is an existing core group with organisational support. While BRG’s influence is evident, SEEP has significantly modified this process over 10 years, and SEEP has only recently become an independent entity. Evidently, knowledge transfer between organisations, and the evolution of foundational tools and specific tactics, takes time, commitment and material.

This analysis of the role of SEEP in civil society supports the dialectical view proposed by Rappaport. As well as usefully and simply presenting communicative action as narrative, community psychology also provides empirical support for Habermas. Gaining an empowered identity is a phenomenon of structures and relationships rather than a quality of actors. Structured opportunities to impart our stories and assess the values in the choices and decisions that those stories convey, are both personal and civic events. Organisation for empowerment implies the creation of independent spaces in which individuals can act according to their consciences. These new settings of self-organisation and civic autonomy serve a legitimating function for people to experience a sense of personal power and control in a social environment. Continuing group effectiveness requires that the values represented by an organisation are an anchor, providing identity for person and group as participants in civil society. The security of that anchor relies on it being embedded in the lifeworld, and subject to continuing validation by expanding engagement with civil society.

That empowerment is called for as a strategy for social change implies that a disparity of power must exist, expressed as a structural relationship between oppressor and oppressed. It is the narrative of oppression that members bring to the group setting. For empowerment to occur, organisational telos must be evident in the development of an alternative narrative. In these circumstances, dissent is inevitably a part of civic autonomy because the critical consciousness that is necessary to an alternative narrative creates discontent as an expression of the oppressive situation. If there is no disparity of power, empowerment is not called for as a strategy.

Having established here that an empowerment methodology is transferrable between cultures and settings, the next chapter considers the quite different setting of Aboriginal Australia as an opportunity to further expand the understanding of the operation of an empowerment program in circumstances of continuing colonial oppression.
Chapter 4

Family WellBeing – Empowering Research

“It's an eye-opener …”

Family WellBeing course participant, Hopevale (Tsey et.al. 2003)

4.1 Part I – Empowerment in Indigenous Australia

4.1.1 Introduction

As noted in the Introduction to the present study, the author has observed a lack of empowerment-based programs in Aboriginal Australia; more particularly, of those that bear any resemblance to the Pacific organisations and programs discussed in the previous chapters. It was this observed lack that motivated initial research on this topic. In the 1990s there was a burst of interest in the study of empowerment for Aboriginal Australians associated with community planning and community development when the now defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) tied funding of future programs to the development of community plans, and provided funds for the purpose of plan preparation (Wolfe 1994). While many communities employed a consultant to prepare a plan to meet the requirement, others made attempts to use the opportunity to genuinely seek community participation in making and controlling community plans.

These communities found that “there is no facility at government, resource agency or community level devoted to and capable of undertaking quality planning and development work” that gave Aboriginal people “the power to decide” (Wolfe 1994:5). Across the board, from ATSIC staff to local organisations and communities, the program fell short because it did not find “an effective way of incorporating education and training components, or of providing planning support on a long term basis” (Wolfe 1994:3). In other words, there was in Australia no body able to provide the kinds of organisational, facilitation or communication skills that could build

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55 There is some conflict in the present study between the use of “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” to describe Australia’s first people. This arises from the fact that while “Aboriginal” seems to be the preferred term in the south of the country, in the north, first peoples also include Torres Strait Islanders, and consequently the broader term “Indigenous” is commonly used. Being of the south, the author has generally used the term “Aboriginal”, unless the setting is specifically related to northern Australia, where this case study is located.
empowerment and control in a community development setting. Furthermore, looking across the organisations that Wolfe surveyed in 1994, from homelands resource associations to Land Councils and the Aboriginal education sector, every group, while called “non-government”, was dependent on state funding and existed as a response to legislative requirement or state imperative. All were subject to the state’s requirements of accountability for expenditures within specific program guidelines. These were not “voluntary” organisations in the sense developed in the previous chapters.

Of the communities that sought to develop a voluntary approach to community planning, of interest to the present study is the work of Alan Randall from the time he was based at Walungurru on behalf of the Northern Territory Open College. Evolving over a six-year period, the program developed by Randall and the Walungurru community followed many of the paths established for community development seen in the previous chapters: Indigenous-developed program, the use of itinerant teams of Aboriginal paraprofessionals, extended community stays with follow-up visits, and continuing education and training based in Alice Springs. What is of interest is that the ultimate destiny of this program was to become formalised as part of a certificate in Aboriginal Community Administration on the model of the Community Management Training Unit of the South Australian School of Aboriginal Education of the Technical and Further Education system (Wolfe 1994). The early sense of a programmed team approach that included a paraprofessional outreach component was lost as the course became a module in a certified qualification.

More recently, Estelle Con-Goo reports in 2003 that “it is very difficult to locate documentation on individual empowerment in an [Australian] Indigenous context” (Con-Goo 2003:11). Empowerment may be raised as an issue, but falls short of being the matter of central concern (Eversole 2003). Generally, from 2000 onwards interest in the study of Aboriginal empowerment in Australia was found in the field of health, particularly mental health in primary health-care settings, where it has persisted. In this field, empowerment generally falls under the rubric of “social and emotional wellbeing” (Henderson 2004; Campbell 2007). In this context, there still remains a paucity in documentation of the experience of practitioners, and a base from which to build the types of empowerment skills referred to in previous chapters (Campbell 2007; McCalman et.al. 2009). The notable exception to this is the work undertaken by the James Cook University Empowerment Research Program (ERP).

56 Also known as “Kintore”.
Whereas in the previous chapters the organisation and its program have been synonymous, here, the program – the Family WellBeing program – was adopted and promulgated in an organised way as a framework for participatory action research undertaken by the Empowerment Research Program (ERP 2006). This research has been consistently published in the fields of community psychology, psychiatry, and primary, community and rural health (Tsey & Every 2000; Tsey et.al. 2003; Tsey et.al. 2004; Whiteside et.al. 2005; Whiteside et.al. 2009; Haswell et.al. 2010; Tsey 2010 and others). The Family WellBeing program is an accredited course providing a Certificate II level qualification under the Australian vocational training system. Through the auspices of the ERP, unlike Randall’s experience, the training modules of the Family WellBeing course continue to be a part of a coherent program.

4.1.2 Family WellBeing and the Empowerment Research Program

The Family WellBeing program originated in Adelaide in the early 1990s. Its genesis was with small groups of Aboriginal people, including “Stolen Generation” survivors. The Aboriginal Education Development Branch (AEDB) of the South Australian Department of Education, Employment and Training initiated the Family WellBeing program as a community development program to address the barriers to employment for Aboriginal people. It began by informally providing lunches as a means to bring Aboriginal people together to discuss issues of local concern. The participants, recognising that they needed more skills to heal themselves and their communities, sought support to develop a more structured program. This became the Family WellBeing course, developed with initial assistance from the AEDB, and later the Indigenous division of the South Australian Department of Vocational Education and Training (Whiteside et.al. 2009; McCalman 2011a: research interview). The training was designed to ultimately provide a qualification in counselling. Importantly, the content of the program had been generated by Indigenous people, responding to the needs they had identified. The accredited program that developed was delivered in four stages, with a further “Train the Trainer” stage that includes 150 of hours of practice presentation. Each stage is designed to be delivered in 30 hours of face time, by two

57 The original course was accredited in South Australia. It is delivered as an accredited course by ERP trained facilitators in Queensland and NSW under agreement with the Bachelor Institute in the Northern Territory. Its accreditation expired at the end of 2010, and it was downgraded from a Cert. III to a Cert. II course (McCalman 2011: email response).
58 Adults who, as a consequence of government policy, were removed as children from their families and surroundings and placed with white Australian families or into group “homes” operated by missions.
facilitators working in tandem, either as a one-week block, or as a weekly session over four weeks.

The numerous South Australian Family WellBeing (FWB) groups that formed gradually became a network of trained facilitators acting as FWB Coordinators and group workers, delivering and continuing to develop the program. These Coordinators organised FWB in their area, attended regular group briefings in Adelaide and continued to develop their professional counselling skills (Tsey et.al. 2006). This network disintegrated when funding arrangements changed, and FWB seemed destined to meet the same fate as Alan Randall’s work, becoming a course in counselling in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, without the ongoing support needed to maintain a coordinated program in a group format.

Fortunately, FWB was spared the fate of Randall’s earlier efforts. In 1998, a coalition of groups in Alice Springs led by Tangentyere Council, received funding under the National Suicide Prevention Program following a wave of youth suicide in the region. Seeking a program to provide skills for professionals, families and young people at risk, the Council connected with some of the FWB trained facilitators in Adelaide to deliver this program (Tsey & Every 2000). The initial contact between Family WellBeing and the James Cook University Empowerment Research Program (ERP) occurred the following year, when Professor Komla Tsey, then with the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Queensland, enlisted as a “participant evaluator” in the FWB course at the invitation of the coalition (Tsey & Every 2000).

Based on earlier work carried out during the 1990s by the Menzies School of Health Research and the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (Boughton 2000; Boughton 2001; Condon et.al. 2001), Tsey and others had identified empowerment and control as two critical emergent themes in speaking with Aboriginal people and health services across the Northern Territory (Devitt et.al. 2001). Through his participation, Tsey identified Family WellBeing as a potential vehicle for research into

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59 FWB groups met in Murray Bridge, Port Augusta, Ceduna, Adelaide, Whyalla, Port Adelaide, Point Pearce, Enfield and Noarlunga. These groups also conducted their own limited outreach activities to include Kooniba, Yalata, Port Pirie and Port Lincoln.

60 In 1928 Mparntwe (Alice Springs) was declared a prohibited area for Aborigines. By the late 1960s, as many Aboriginal stockmen were laid off following the determination that they be paid award wages, substantial “town camps” developed around the fringes of Mparntwe. Tangentyere Council developed to provide municipal and other services to these settlements.

61 Adelaide, “down south”, remains the metropolitan centre not only of South Australia but also of the Northern Territory. In spite of the distance, it is not surprising that people in Alice Springs would look in that direction for support, and maintain networks there.
these dimensions as social determinants of Aboriginal health. Tsey assessed the value of the Family WellBeing program as effective “in assisting individual participants, through personal empowerment, to increase their capabilities – that is, enhance their awareness, resilience and problem solving ability” (Tsey & Every 2000). Being an action researcher, Tsey asked participants what measures they would consider relevant to assess in the program. This led to the development of a standard evaluation sheet, which has since been extensively used to assess the effect of the program on self, extended family, workplace and one’s wider community (Tsey et.al. 2009). The apparent success of the Family WellBeing course in Alice Springs resulted in its adoption by the James Cook University/University of Queensland research team led by Tsey.\(^\text{62}\) The research has been conducted by a range of diverse partnerships and people, including but not limited to:

- James Cook University, School of Indigenous Australian Studies and School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine (Yvonne Cadet James, Valda Wallace, Komla Tsey, Mark Wenitong, Mary Whiteside and Janya McCalman);
- University of Queensland, School of Population Health (Melissa Haswell Andrew Wilson, Brenda Hall, Arlene LaLiberte, Lyndon Reilly and Rachael Wargent);
- Apunipima Cape York Health Council (Teresa Gibson, Liz Pearson and Cleveland Fagan);
- Gurriny Yealamucka Health Council Aboriginal Corporation, Yarrabah (David Baird, Ruth Fagan, David Patterson, Bradley Baird, Les Baird, Senimelia Kingsburra and Kaylene Jackson);
- Tangentyere Council, Alice Springs (Eunice Blackmore and Kathy Abbott);
- Yaba Bimbie Men’s Group, Yarrabah (David Patterson, Bradley Baird and Dennis Warta);
- Ma’Ddaimba-Balas Men’s Group Innisfail (Darryl Ahkee, Anthony Jia and David Ambrum);
- Queensland Department of Communities (formerly Department of Families), North Queensland Regional Office (Karen Dini-Paul) (Tsey et.al. 2006).

\(^{62}\) Beginning with the Menzies School of Health in Alice Springs, Tsey has changed institutions a number of times, whilst maintaining his consistent focus on empowerment and control. Continuing collaboration between the various institutions where Tsey has been influential is a feature of the Empowerment Research Program.
More recently, the Empowerment Research Program and Family WellBeing course delivery has been further extended. In 2009 the Royal Flying Doctor Service, using ERP-trained facilitators, coordinated the five stages of FWB training for the Lower Gulf townships of Normanton, Mornington Island and Doomadgee. The training was coordinated by Ann Kreger and facilitated by Cath Brown, Lyndon Reilly and Teresa Gibson. In February 2010, 11 staff from five Aboriginal Medical Services on the North Coast of NSW participated in Stage 1 of the Family WellBeing Training at Ballina through the Many Rivers Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance (FWB 2010).

Being an accredited course, FWB has remained largely fixed in the course content. Limitations of time, low levels of educational attainment and limited previous experience of facilitation processes have been constraints in the delivery of the program to Stage 5 (Daly et.al. 2005; Kreger 2011: research interview; McCalman 2011a: research interview), and frequently only Stage 1 is delivered (McCalman 2011a: research interview). Also, there has been a perception that the Certificate in Counselling proposes a deficit model of people having “a problem” which requires fixing through “counselling”, which is seen as being at odds with the strengths-based orientation of the ERP (McCalman 2011a: research interview). In terms of promotion, a course to address leadership is likely to be more attractive to Indigenous people than one to address counselling (Brown 2011: research interview). In response to these factors, the course has been condensed by Tsey and Gibson for use as a non-accredited version called “Concept of Leadership and Empowerment”. Similarly, Tangentyere Council have selected elements of the program to develop a non-accredited version, called “Community WellBeing Course for Young Women” (Stearne 2010). Both of these courses use unaltered modules from the accredited course, primarily from Stage 1.

4.1.3 Aims and Objectives

For this researcher, Family WellBeing stood out for its longevity, consistency of purpose, adaptability, and for the fact of it having been developed with Indigenous people. Adoption by the Empowerment Research Program as a framework for participatory action research introduced the element of an organised program. This provided sufficient rationale for including the FWB/ERP as an empowerment program

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63 The complete list of FWB sites extends further than this. As well as additional trial sites in the Cape York Region associated with the ERP (Hopevale, Wujal Wujal, Wuchopperen [Cairns Aboriginal Medical Service]), the program has been independently used with groups in the South Australian Riverland, Tasmania, and has been trialled in Papua New Guinea. See McCalman, PhD thesis, upcoming.
with enough similarity to the Pacific programs to provide a useful measure of the applicability of the Pacific model to Indigenous Australia. As would be expected given its action orientation, the research has been undertaken in complementary ways: by participants to discover useful knowledge for themselves, and as evidence for empowerment and control as determinants of health and as outcomes of program activity.

Given that the FWB program and the ERP are not synonymous (in the same way as the Pacific organisations and their programs are) immediately raises the possibility that the aims and objectives of each may not be synonymous either. This is indeed the case. To first consider the Empowerment Research Program, it sets out to:

develop a 10-year action-oriented research program in order to test the usefulness of “empowerment” and “control” as analytical tools for understanding and addressing the social determinants of health among Indigenous Australians (ERP 2006).

Being part of a university research institute, the ERP addresses itself to specific research objectives with a strong basis in theory and the search for evidence. Publication of results constitutes a significant aim of any research endeavour. Through its publications, a major need being addressed by the ERP is to establish the evidence for empowerment-based interventions in Australian Indigenous communities. Through its design as participatory action research on the model of Minkler and Wallerstein’s Community Based Participatory Research, the ERP has contributed to change in Indigenous communities (Tsey et.al. 2009). From its beginnings, in 2001, in the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health, to 2011 and its manifestation as an action research program hub at The Cairns Institute (James Cook University, Cairns), the ERP contributed 54 published articles to peer-reviewed journals, 12 monographs as book chapters and 26 research reports for a variety of stakeholders (ERP 2011). In other words, as would be expected, the ERP aims to meet the requirements of sustaining an academic research program, promulgating its findings through sustained, quality publication of results. This program has included the development of the Growth and Empowerment Measure, a psychometric scale designed to collect “valid and reliable data on domains of empowerment that are

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64 This will be addressed in more detail in Part 2 of this chapter, which, as with previous chapters, concerns itself with theoretical perspectives.
relevant to Indigenous Australians” (Haswell et.al. 2010).

Similarly, the ERP needs to sustain itself through winning research grant awards. A broad mix of short-term income sources have sustained its consistent, decade-long research activity. The National Suicide Prevention Program was a significant source of funds in the early establishment phase. Later, as the ERP expanded and refined its approach, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Research Council became major sources of program funds. Cooperative Research Centre support has also been significant. A range of smaller funding arrangements have been entered into, including professional development, cooperation with family support services and shire councils, and program evaluation projects (ERP 2011).

What is apparent is that the ERP has been successful in supporting a decade-long research agenda by composing a range of shorter-term projects into a coherent and worthwhile whole.\(^6\) In the author’s experience, this is a common phenomenon for those seeking to achieve worthwhile outcomes in Aboriginal communities. This recalls the situation in international development 30 years ago, when empowerment and community development were still relatively unexplored territory. The funding situation of SIDT referred to in Chapter 1 is one example of this.

The ERP consciously oriented itself as a participatory action research program. That is, it sought to use research expertise to increase the capability of research subjects to conduct research themselves on issues they identified as significant through their own, guided investigations. The framework to achieve this was provided by the Family WellBeing Program.

Superficially, the aim of the Family WellBeing program was to provide training for participants to the level required to achieve a Certificate II level qualification in counselling. Recalling its beginnings with groups of Indigenous people meeting together, and then seeking out further skills to address the issues they were uncovering, the Family WellBeing program sought to develop “key understandings and skills that help Indigenous people to heal and become leaders in their communities” (Haswell & Gibson 2001). As part of the ERP, the Family WellBeing program has been aimed primarily at two audiences: existing interest groups, specifically men’s and women’s...

\(^6\) This recalls the situation of SIDT, required to report and produce results for a diverse audience of donors. Grants for work in palliative care and swine flu containment are appropriate for the methodology, and the ERP is able to add value to these by making them part of a larger program, contributing its core business of building health leadership, skills and organisational capacity, and empowering local voluntary organisations. However, the necessity of patchwork funding adds administrative load and makes it harder to maintain a singular focus.
groups; and staff from health and welfare organisations, particularly in the areas of alcohol and other drug rehabilitation, and mental health.66

Consequently, the program can be viewed in two associated ways: as a means of personal transformation; and as a means to build core capacity within organisations, in this case health and welfare services (Tsey 2011: research interview). This is reflected in a FWB promotional “flyer” that briefly outlines the program. On the one hand, it aims to:

“empower” participants and their families through training in analytical and problem solving skills so as to assume greater control and responsibility over the conditions influencing their lives (Daly et.al. 2005).

In this context, the outcomes of FWB have been promoted in the following terms. It

• is an “eye-opener”, and helped them understand the many things that have influenced them, the emotional burden (often anger) they carry from unresolved issues in the past and the reasons why they are struggling to find hope and meaning in their lives;

• helped them to think about situations before reacting in a harmful way – understanding how emotional reactions can lead to negative actions allows people to make positive choices;

• gave them skills to recognise the drama that locks us into harmful relationships and to change them into positive ones where growth can happen;

• enhanced their self-esteem and problem solving skills to be able to reach for higher goals, better jobs, study opportunities and greater achievements;

• helped them to work better in groups, find their voices to speak out and become better listeners, be more supportive and sensitive to the needs of other people and work towards a better community (Haswell & Gibson 2001).

On the other hand, within organisations, staff can become a “more empowered group” (Haswell & Gibson 2001) through FWB. FWB is “a means for providing workers with more skills to deal with intrapersonal issues, an opportunity to reflect on their practice,

66 There was also an adaptation of the program that was applied with school-aged children to equip them with better skills for coping in the home environment. While this was well received, it has not been a persistent component of the program over the period of the ERP.
and tools to use in their work with clients” (Whiteside et al. 2005). 7. FWB creates a “safe space” for Indigenous workers to:

- open up and talk about themselves;
- recognise their own strengths as well as those of others;
- understand what makes a good, respectful relationship;
- become able to see the opportunities that even painful loss can bring;
- gain greater understanding and respect for their fellow workers;
- recognise and foster each other’s strengths and challenges;
- learn to speak out and be heard assertively when something is not right (Haswell & Gibson 2001).

An interesting aspect of the ERP/FWB program has been to create educational pathways leading to formal qualifications, with the objective of achievement at the highest level. It was recognised early in the implementation of the ERP program that to sustain the program, “ongoing training and supportive supervision will be necessary, and a mix of skills including people with local knowledge and people with formal qualification is required” (Daly et al. 2005:5). This “mix” continues to be nurtured through, for example, the recent development of a unit titled “Empowerment and Change” as a component of a Masters degree by coursework in the fields of public health and social sciences. A growth pathway now exists – from entry with experience of a non-accredited course, through Stages 1 to 5 of Family WellBeing, and ultimately to PhD level studies – a pathway combining experience and achievement with formal recognition. Opening the kind of pathway presented by FWB and the ERP, from VET certificate to tertiary level, demonstrates the breadth of the ERP team’s activity and the degree of creative and critical thinking of which it is capable.

4.1.4 Strategies

As discussed above, Tsey’s earlier work with the Menzies School identified “empowerment” and “control” as potentially significant social determinants of health. Tsey’s opportunity to undertake study of these factors in a participatory action research project emerged initially at Yarrabah, a DOGIT67 township 54 km south by road from

67 Deed of Grant in Trust. Yarrabah was established as an Anglican mission on the coast of Cape York Peninsula in 1892, among the first gazetted Aboriginal reserves. In 1960, the State of Queensland took over its management and in 1984 Yarrabah gained its Deed of Grant in Trust (facilitated by Roy Gray as Chair of the Yarrabah Council), which made the reserve a self-managing local government area. Many of the current residents are the descendants of people who were forcibly removed to the mission/reserve, living alongside the traditional landowning clans of the immediate area (Denigan 2008, McEwan & Tsey et al. 2009).
Cairns. Yarrabah, population 3000, had experienced a spate of youth suicides in the mid 1980s and again 10 years later (Mitchell 2000). The presence of existing self-management structures and voluntary organisation provided a platform for the Yarrabah people to request and participate in development of the Family WellBeing program in the community. This consisted of working with the Yaba Bimbie (Father/Son) men’s group, formed in 1997 in response to youth suicide, and partnership with the Yarrabah-based and Aboriginal-controlled Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service (McCalman et.al. 2009). This demonstrates an early strategy of the ERP: seeking out Indigenous-controlled groups who have identified, if perhaps not entirely articulated, that training in analytical and problem-solving skills – so as to assume greater control and responsibility over the conditions influencing their lives – is a desirable aspect the group’s role. This is precisely the way in which FWB came to exist in the first instance.

Initially, the intention was to recruit a core group of persons in Yarrabah to be trained as FWB facilitators – that is, to complete the accredited course to Stage 5. This proved to be impractical. Nevertheless, recruitment and training of facilitators remained, and has continued to be a major part of the ERP/FWB strategy. In 2011, a core group of some 10–12 facilitators has been developed in the Cairns district, and as many as 70 people have received training to Certificate II level across Cape York. Whilst the Cairns group continue to be in frequent contact and form a loose, informal support network, the remainder have only their own informal networks for keeping in touch. The ERP has sporadically produced a newsletter to maintain some level of contact, but financial support for maintaining contact and sustaining a network of facilitators has been elusive (McCalman 2011a: research interview).

The focus of the ERP has been on voluntary organisations such as men’s and women’s groups, and on more formal community-controlled organisations, in particular organisations involved in primary health care and/or drug and alcohol rehabilitation. The availability of funds and expertise to support empowerment-based training activities appears limited for voluntary associations such as men’s and women’s groups, and little evidence was found of a continuous FWB program operated by a voluntary association.68 In the Cape York region, apart from the Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service and the Gindaja Treatment and Healing Centre (both at Yarrabah, with its proximity to Cairns and long relationship with the ERP), it appears to have been

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68 Tangentyere Council appears as the major exception, offering FWB since 1997 as part of its social support and research program.
difficult to convince health and other organisations that dedicating resources to employing and maintaining facilitators to deliver empowerment-based training is a worthwhile priority (Kreger 2011: research interview). Consequently, the major core of trained facilitators orbit around the ERP, employed by the university as Research Officers, being instrumental to the conduct of the participatory action research of the ERP. Other organisations can contract these Research Officers to conduct the FWB program, with evaluations and other reports generally appearing as published papers in peer-reviewed journals.

Otherwise, FWB trainees appear to work in relative isolation, with the cost of remote travel and the time constraints imposed by meeting the demands of their workplace performance indicators restricting their ability both to implement and advance the objectives of Family WellBeing (Kreger 2011). These difficulties in implementing a participatory project are not new. Indeed, they recall Alinsky’s assessment of the “Back of the Yards” project – that organisations in remote communities typically are “professional formal agencies which are, first, superimposed upon the community and, second, play a superficial role in the life of the community” (Alinsky 1941).

Such agencies are in stark contrast to the objectives of empowerment and participatory research. Unlike the Pacific groups, there is very limited capacity to support ongoing personal and organisational development through regular briefings or other formalised group processes for existing trainees. Groups can request “refresher” courses; however, this appears different in kind to an opportunity to specifically reflect on FWB implementation in the community, and to work on continued skill development and deeper analysis of, and action on, specific issues arising from implementation.

However, there is promising evidence of the Royal Flying Doctor Service expanding continuing support opportunities for the core group of persons it has trained to Stage 5 in the townships of Mornington Island, Doomagee and Normanton (Kreger 2011).

For the ERP, the development and maintenance of key partnerships is essential. As well as often being a requirement for funding and research ethics approval, demonstrating as it does a relationship with a recipient community, the ERP requires a community entry platform for implementation of the FWB program. This again recalls Alinksy, and the time and effort spent on organising local coalitions to act as the platform for activities. In the Australian context, and in the context of the ERP, time constraints related to funding have been a bar to this kind of effort.
It is apparent that for the ERP, if there is not an existing platform prepared to act as an implementation base, it is difficult to advance. This was one of the significant constraints in expanding the experience gained at Yarrabah to other communities (McCalman et.al. 2009; McCalman 2011a: research interview). The “Building Bridges” project, designed to share experience and expand the FWB program to more remote Cape York locations, had a two-year time frame. In the author’s experience, one could easily spend the entire two years building sufficient trust and understanding to develop a worthwhile working partnership or coalition as the basis for proceeding to further develop and expand a specific program. In the efforts described in the Pacific, or for that matter described by Alinksy in the United States, this use of time and resources appears unexceptional. In Australia, however, it has proved most difficult.  

4.1.5 Tools and Methodologies

The Family WellBeing Certificate II in Counselling is a structured course typical of the vocational education system. Each lesson has a specified content plan and specified learning objectives. Each course participant is expected to maintain a journal throughout the course, recording his or her responses to specific questions participants are asked to reflect on, and to write down other reflections or difficulties encountered inside and outside the learning environment. It is worth providing a topic list from the shortened “Leadership and Empowerment” course as indicative of the content:

- Basic human qualities (looks at leadership, who we admire and why);
- Basic human needs (conceptualises basic needs in terms of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs);
- Life journey (develop a personal timeline to understand how each individual has dealt with life challenges in the past);
- Conflict resolution (provides a framework for understanding conflict and ways to reduce tension in conflict situations);
- Understanding emotions (understanding emotions as potential determinants of health, and finding healthy ways to express emotion);
- Understanding crisis (ways to deal with crisis, and understanding that crisis can also provide opportunities for transformation);
- Loss and grief (understanding the process of loss and grief);

69 This is a matter of considerable practical interest, and may help to explain the lack of empowerment programs in Indigenous Australia. The apparent inability of government programs to develop worthwhile relationships, and the weakness of the non-government sector in Australia, may go some way towards an explanation. This, however, could be the topic for another thesis.
• Beliefs and attitudes (understanding and appreciating different perspectives, and how beliefs and attitudes constrain or facilitate change);
• Personal and group work (considering how to use the skills and knowledge gained during the course at home, in the workplace, and in the community);
• Developing your leadership style (identifying personal leadership roles and the qualities each brings to them).

To deliver the course effectively, a great deal relies on the abilities of the facilitator to build trust and a shared sense of confidence within the group. As with the other groups examined in earlier chapters, the facilitator’s place as role model stands out.

FWB facilitators have all emphasised the importance of the initial “group agreement” in establishing trust and solidarity (Brown 2011: research interview). This is the process whereby the group decides on the rules under which the group will operate. The group agreement establishes a safe environment for participants, and teaches respect for maintaining mutual agreements (Whiteside et al. 2006). Discussions with facilitators have stressed that the group agreement must be allocated plenty of time, as it is essential to give the group control from the outset (Brown 2011: research interview; Reilly 2011: research interview). Generally, any group will develop an appropriate list of agreements without much prompting. The facilitator only needs to prompt to ensure essential items such as confidentiality, mutual respect, attendance, mutual support, use of time and so on are included.

As noted above, FWB and the ERP have had difficulty in providing opportunities for facilitators to come together to debrief, share experiences and further develop skills and techniques. As a consequence, the individual style of each facilitator tends to stand out, and there is a lot of variability in delivery. However, in addition to the Group Agreement, facilitators all make use of “ice breakers” for getting started and “energisers” for those slow afternoon sessions. The use of these trust-building tools, in the view of this author, shows the indispensible role of Indigenous facilitators. The judgement about what will or will not be a culturally appropriate game for a group of Indigenous adults is one requiring a lot of experience. Perhaps as a consequence of the lack of debriefing opportunities, the FWB facilitators make limited use of active learning strategies such as role plays or structured activities. By comparison with the Bismark Ramu Group or the Social Empowerment Education Program, the lack of
opportunities to continue to build facilitator skills and confidence by regularly bringing facilitators together stands out as a critical weakness in building capacity to deliver FWB.

Risks also arise from this situation. FWB facilitators are often working in highly stressful situations. The trust-building process in many instances requires the facilitator to “go first” early in the Stage 1 process, sharing his or her own struggles and difficulties at the same time as working with the group. In 2011, there were FWB facilitators working with prison inmates. Every FWB session, regardless of the setting, has the potential to throw up ethical dilemmas for facilitators, particularly around sensitive issues such as children and violence. Facilitators must have completed all FWB modules, plus the facilitator module and 150 hours of supervised facilitation with an experienced person. Groups are always co-facilitated by two workers, and there is access to counselling if called for. However, given the lack of centralised coordination and the diffuse nature of FWB facilitation, people do not always take advantage of the guidelines that are provided. More usually it appears that facilitators “debrief in the car on the way back” (Reilly 2011: research interview).

As with the Pacific organisations, the skill and dedication of the facilitators stands out. They work because “we love to see the change in people from where they start to where they finish” (Reilly 2011: research interview; Wargent 2011: research interview). The qualities sought after in the paraprofessionals of the previous chapters are absolutely present: leadership, fearlessness, strongly held core values. Also present is a sense of a FWB community: people who have shared a special experience of seeing others grow through allowing themselves to be vulnerable; coming to understand themselves and others in a process of healing and renewal. Like the Ghandi quote from Chapter 3, Dr Roxanne Bainbridge of the ERP comments that the facilitator must “embody the program yourself”, modelling the intended behaviours. The FWB facilitators and the ERP team are a community, the people who “get it” when it comes to seeing why empowerment is an essential part of bringing new life to crippling social circumstances (Bainbridge et.al. 2011). As one indication of the creative energy of the facilitators, Lyndon Reilly and Rachael Wargent, two experienced and skilled facilitators, developed the following acrostic:

- **Brainstorm**
- **Practice**
- **Understand**
- **Reflect**
- **Interact**
- **Integrate**
- **Listen/Learn**
- **Deliver**
- **Develop**
- **Evaluate**
Lyndon and Rachael’s acrostic reflects an additional element of the FWB program as practiced by the ERP: it involves more than just learning. Following Zimmerman and Wallerstein (Zimmerman 2000; Wallerstein & Duran 2006), the ERP identifies empowerment as a multi-level construct consisting of individual, community and social levels. Consequently, the practice of the ERP includes a “2-step approach”. The first step is to build individual empowerment and group solidarity. The Family WellBeing training is the primary vehicle for this step. The second step is to practice that new-found pride to “collectively address priority structural issues identified from the personal development training” (Whiteside et.al. 2005).

While organizing of this type is an element that has been aspired to throughout the program, its achievement has been hampered by the availability of funds that can be used for this purpose, in the knowledge that effective organizing requires an open-ended period of continuing contact. At its best, the second step has appeared as Alinsky-style organizing. Review of the FWB/ERP literature and reporting shows this was unequivocally achieved twice, in Yarrabah and Hopevale. In the absence of organizing capacity within the ERP, there has grown a view that the ERP will contribute to community and social levels of change through individual empowerment and group solidarity having a wider flow-on, or “ripple”, effect for employees in organisations or for members in a community (McCalman 2011a: research interview). Like SIDT, there is the view that social-level change will ultimately occur through contact with a “critical mass” of participants (Tsey & Every 2000). However, as alluded to above, even maintaining a loose network of trained facilitators has been difficult, and falls short of the aspirations of the ERP.

The published literature on the Empowerment Research Program shows that empowerment and control are essential to enhancing Indigenous wellbeing at an individual level, and that for Aboriginal people these determinants are constrained by broader structural forces at community and social levels. This highlights the need for empowerment processes that extend beyond the individual and the group. Unlike the organisations in the previous chapters, this has been extraordinarily difficult to achieve in the Australian context.

70 This was in one of the early FWB/ERP trials at Yarrabah, recorded in the report "We're the Talk of the Town" (2005). The organised action involved marginalised Yarrabah residents in achieving greater access to local council services and better security of their land-holdings.
4.2 Part II – Analysis: Empowerment, Research and Basic Human Need

4.2.1 Empowerment in Australia and the Pacific

As indicated earlier, the Family WellBeing program was chosen to provide a comparison with the Pacific groups as a way of responding to a question about whether the Pacific techniques and methodologies were applicable in Indigenous Australia. In the previous chapters we have seen that the Pacific organisations and their programs have some continuity, through personnel and the transfer of tools and techniques. Over the period 1982 to 2010, collectively the Pacific organisations have demonstrated the adaptability of an approach to empowerment using a particular set of tools and techniques, delivered by paraprofessionals in a community setting.

There is no such continuity between the Pacific groups and Family WellBeing or the Empowerment Research Program. These latter two have evolved in the context of Aboriginal Australia. In addition, they have evolved in response to community problems that revolve around subjects such as family healing, youth suicide, and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. This appears quite unlike the development scenarios considered in the Pacific.

The initial research question for the present study asked about the applicability of the Pacific tools and techniques to Aboriginal Australia. In finding the Family WellBeing program, the question of the applicability of programs developed to build personal and community empowerment and control was answered in the affirmative. The operation of the FWB program by the James Cook University research team added the ingredient of an organised approach. Looking to the above profile, the following points of similarity emerge:

- a program developed with Indigenous control of the program content;
- a structured set of learning tools that aim to anchor people in their own experience as a valid source of knowledge;
- the critical importance of the quality of the paraprofessionals, with these practitioners requiring skills in group facilitation and the ability to provide a behavioural role model;
- an organisation that organizes, maintaining an overall coherence and consistency of approach;
- an organisation and its personnel that forms an identifiable reflexive community;
• reliance on intrinsic motivation in the learning group, and a voluntary organisational platform within the recipient community.

There are also important points of difference, as well as specific challenges. It appears likely that many of these differences arise in the context of Australian Indigenous townships. This is an important topic, which the author will pursue further in later work, separate to the present study. For now, these points of difference are iterated with some brief comment:

• The problem of sustaining a group. FWB participant evaluation reports show participant support for the program, but also show that numbers attending sessions decline quickly, and that relatively few people are able to complete a comprehensive set of FWB materials. It is often proposed that the level of trauma and lack of control over life incidents in Aboriginal Australian townships makes it very hard to sustain consistent participation by a group. The many funerals and other major incidents such as hospitalisation of a family member often pull people away;

• Lack of interest in another “new program”. FWB reports show the difficulty of initiating programs in Aboriginal townships. Whereas in the Pacific curiosity tends to be generated by the relatively rare event of a group of strangers coming to the community, in Australia there is participation and program burn-out. Politicians and public servants fly in and out, new programs are announced, new “community consultations” held, and meanwhile, little changes on the ground. There is an understandably high level of cynicism about anything novel;

• The welfare “safety net” provides an individual alternative to finding community solutions. The Pacific nations mentioned have very limited systems of state welfare. This may be one reason the overseas-funded non-government sector is so large in these nations. By comparison, individual welfare payments decrease the need for wider cooperation to meet basic needs. There is a decreased need for voluntary association;

• Pervasive hopelessness. Evidence of this is to be found in the course content of the Family WellBeing program. Recalling that the course was developed by Aboriginal people, the inclusion of understanding crisis, dealing with loss and grief, family violence and abuse as the major themes in a generalised course for Aboriginal counsellors suggests the extent of the challenges they face.
There are also differences in program delivery:

- Fragmentary funding. The Empowerment Research Program relies on a patchwork of funding to support the overall program. A significant amount of time is therefore spent on applications, approvals, reporting and general administration. This appeared earlier as one of the weaknesses of the Solomon Islands Development Trust;
- Separation of organisation and program. As noted, the ERP employs the FWB program as a vehicle for research. This has led to some difficulties when dealing with potential client organisations wishing to adopt the FWB program, as program delivery is not really a function of the ERP. Its function is research;
- The “paraprofessionals” in this case have a nationally recognised vocational qualification.\(^{71}\)

In spite of these differences, what is significant for the current study is that here is an empowerment-based program that has been operating in Australia since 1993, and for the last 10 years has been promulgated in an organised way in the Cape York region. The question as to whether the Pacific techniques are applicable in Aboriginal Australia can be answered in the affirmative. Given that this is the case, it is now possible to also consider the contribution of the Family WellBeing program and the Empowerment Research Program to what subsequently became the central concern of the present study: empowerment, and the organisational requirements for delivery of empowerment programs as interventions.

4.2.2 Social and Emotional Wellbeing and the Control Factor

In Australia, empowerment is associated with the field of health, and in particular that sub-field known as “social and emotional wellbeing”. While the notion of “social wellbeing” has immediate resonance with the SIDT model from Chapter 1, the addition of a health perspective, and research on a medical model, adds a new dimension to this exploration of empowerment techniques and methodologies.

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\(^{71}\) A Cert III is considered a minimum professional qualification. The four units of FWB plus the “Train the Trainer” module and 150 hours of supervised practice no longer meets the national standard because, according to the VET provider, “the Cert III now embedded into Cert II – basically the Cert III did not have enough hours under the VET packaging rules to justify it as a level of its own so the ‘one’ course now exists like this. If you do the first 8 units you immediately qualify to get a certificate called Cert II in Family Wellbeing. If you continue on and do the facilitator subset you then get another issue of testamur called The Family WellBeing Facilitator Skill Set.” (Brown, C. email response). Another example of the way the formal qualification system can be obstructive.
The Introduction refers to the work of Michael Marmot and the Whitehall II study, which demonstrated a social gradient of health. At least since Frederick Engels and his 1844 work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, there has been a known association between poverty and poor health. What Marmot’s study showed was that even at higher levels of the social scale, where sufficient money, good housing, education, employment and access to services were the norm, there remained a visible gradient of health. The Whitehall I study, which found an inverse social gradient for coronary heart disease (CHD), also found that this gradient remained after adjusting for known risk factors (smoking, obesity, blood pressure, height, cholersterol). The Whitehall II study set out to test the hypothesis that this observed gradient was due to psychosocial factors, in particular those associated with work. The study found that “control, but not high demand, at work is associated with increased risk of CHD, independent of measures of socioeconomic status” (Marmot et.al. 1997:235). Put simply, Marmot’s findings suggested that it is healthy to be able to influence the events that affect one’s life.

Syme (1998) extends Marmot’s work with the finding that “the social class gradient exists throughout most of the industrialized world and applies to almost all diseases”. Furthermore, he suggests that there is little that is new in the use of control and empowerment in the behavioural sciences, and that “researchers have been applying concepts like mastery, self-efficacy, locus of control, sense of control, powerlessness, competence, and hardiness to their studies of health and other problems” since the early 1970s (Syme 1998:495).

Syme’s contribution is to focus on the problem of interventions that address social disparities. By making the assumption that “control of destiny” best explains the social gradient of health, Syme is led to focus on acquiring “problem-solving skills and access to resources” to deal with life challenges, and consequently to improve health. Drawing on work begun in the 1960s with preschool children of poor, black parents who were admitted to special preschool programs emphasising problem solving based on trial and error, Syme shows the importance of the ability to deal with failure

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72 More specifically, the study found that while control and socioeconomic status are correlated, they are also separable. While other risk factors such as low social supports, hostility, sedentary lifestyle, smoking and car access also correlated with socioeconomic status, no factor explained the social gradient of health as well as control (Marmot et.al. 1997:238).

73 In this instance, by “resources” Syme is not referring to, for example, access to health services, welfare, or even economic or political power. His focus is on resources that contribute to problem-solving skills that in turn improve people’s sense of personal control and empowerment, and hence an ability to better manage life stress.
without sinking into hopelessness. “Hope and mastery are related to better health”, he says, whereas “giving up” is an unhealthy way to deal with major life challenges (Syme 1998:499).

While he does not entirely dismiss the idea of social revolution as a measure to reduce health disparities, the intervention ultimately developed by Syme and others is contained in a modest guidebook, *The Wellness Guide*. It was ultimately developed – with extensive community participation, evolving over eight years – with substantial differences between the first “top-down” draft and later versions. Using simple English and Spanish, the *Guide* traverses major life events from pregnancy and birth to old age and death. The *Guide* is not a lecture on how to be healthy in the usual vein of public health information (eat well, don’t smoke, exercise, and so on). Instead, it is distinctive in two ways: first, it emphasises that in every life situation there are choices; secondly, it lists resources that are available to people to help make those choices. With respect to using those resources, it advises that patience and persistence are part of dealing with state agencies, and gives advice on how to think about, phrase and write down questions before picking up the telephone. It is this focus on problem-solving techniques and how to deal with frustration in the face of initial failure that set the *Guide* apart (Schwab et.al. 1992). Syme’s view that access to resources is an essential part of asserting control links well with Mankowski and Rappaport’s view that personal and community narratives should be regarded as a resource (Mankowski & Rappaport 1995).

Tsey cites both Marmot and Syme as providing one of the basic theoretical perspectives of the Empowerment Research Program (Tsey 2011: research interview). This is visible in the literature on Family WellBeing, which emphasises the “control factor” and supporting Indigenous individuals, families and groups to “develop relevant skills and the capacity to deal with the day-to-day challenges of life” (Tsey 2010). It was these “narratives of change”, as recorded through FWB evaluation processes, that were subsequently used to develop the Growth and Empowerment Measure (GEM) to measure processes and outcomes of psychological and social empowerment. Family WellBeing provides a framework for developing these new narratives in the context of the other aspect of empowering practice identified by Syme: that of learning generic problem-solving skills. Tsey takes this one step further in seeing FWB as:
strengths-based or solution-focussed cognitive reframing, helping participants to indentify opportunities to work around the challenges […] the ability to use generic problem solving skills to deal with day to day life challenges without being overwhelmed by them, a key factor in addressing the social determinants of health (Tsey 2010).

It is difficult to overstate the social consequences of colonisation for Aboriginal Australians. A large and continually growing literature discusses endemic interpersonal violence, self-harm and suicide, homicide, alcohol and drug abuse, incarceration and lack of employment – these in relation to social determinants that include dispossession, the removal of children, forced separation and inter-generational trauma. The volumes containing reviews by Henderson (Henderson et.al. 2007) and Atkinson (Atkinson et.al. 2010) are but two recent examples of this literature, which in addition to peer-reviewed work includes substantial government-sponsored investigations and reports.74

With respect to Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing, two salient points emerge from this literature. First, a health system, including public health initiatives, that focuses on individuals and individual behaviour has not achieved improved health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal Australian, despite “decades of effort and biomedical advancement” (Henderson 2007:140). Second, that in terms of both an Indigenous perspective on health, which values an holistic view encompassing social and spiritual dimensions (Grieves 2009), and in terms of the acute social and cultural changes rapidly forced upon Aboriginal people, loss of power and control appear as central determinants of social and emotional wellbeing. Rapidly changing policies of exploitation, protection, removal, integration, assimilation, self-determination and guardianship continue to erode Aboriginal Australians’ power over and control of the circumstances of their lives. In this author’s view, it does not understate the case to say that even at its most benevolent, the Australian state is perceived by many Aboriginal Australians as a coercive, authoritarian regime. The work of Marmot and Syme makes it clear that this has health consequences. Further, those health consequences must be

74 The milestone reports are: Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991); Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, “Bringing Them Home“ (1997); Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle “Little Children are Sacred” (2007).
addressed as social phenomena, and will not be susceptible to change on the basis of individual medical interventions alone.

4.2.3 *Family WellBeing and Basic Human Need*

As has been developed in the previous chapters, empowerment must be regarded as a group phenomenon. Family WellBeing meets this requirement by being a group intervention. This was most perspicaciously noted by Anne Kreger of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (Keger 2011) as one factor that sets FWB apart from a medical intervention model. By providing a structured means for a group of individuals to share and bond, FWB creates a coherent community able to practise a range of interpersonal skills and assert control in a safe environment. As discussed in Chapter 3 (SEEP), FWB is meeting the requirements for “the creation of new settings that may serve a legitimation function for people to tell their own stories” (Rappaport 1995:799). The first step in this is clearly the group agreement, which gives permission for the group to take charge of itself. From here, the group is guided through sets of resources that build on this initial experience. These resources provide a framework, with participants providing the course content from their own experience. As in the previous chapter, here is the indication that FWB is about developing and sustaining new narratives by creating settings.

Taking the cue from Habermas, the question that can be asked about this framework is: what aspects of the lifeworld are made thematic? In the case of Family WellBeing, primarily what is objectified is the self. This is clearly reflected in the course outline shown earlier: basic human qualities; basic human needs; life journey; conflict resolution; understanding emotions; understanding crisis; loss and grief; beliefs and attitudes. This framework for consideration of the self is composed of two fundamental aspects. First, that every person’s own answers to any challenges are already within him or her, and that solutions should never be imposed. The person can be guided to find his or her own answers through an analytical framework. Second, that there is available to us a universal analytical framework of human needs that are so basic that “whenever any of them are not met, there is a loss within us and we learn to behave in other ways to compensate so that the need will be met” (Tsey et.al. 2006). In FWB, these needs have been categorised into “physical, emotional, mental and spiritual” types (Figure 8).
In the field of psychosocial studies, this idea of basic need as a driver of adaptive behaviour can be traced to two sources. First is Abraham Maslow’s 1943 work, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (Maslow 1943). Maslow’s lasting contribution was recognising that there are both somatic and psychological basic human needs that are met in the healthy person. He proposed that these needs could be represented by these classes: physiological, safety, belongingness/love, esteem, and self-actualisation. He organised these classes into a hierarchy, with physiological need at the base and self-actualisation (and later also self-transcendence) at the top. Maslow proposed this hierarchy as a means to deal with a specific theoretical problem. His primary object was to develop a theory of motivation for which the “integrated wholeness of the organism must be one of the foundation stones”. He was also of the view that the highly material or somatic needs were atypical in as much as they were conscious and localisable, but he had to accept that “a person who is lacking food, safety, love and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else” (Maslow 1943:370–373). It was this recognition of the primacy of somatic need that, in spite of the fact that he believed it to be atypical, led Maslow to propose that need must to some extent be organised in a hierarchy.

By 1959, Maslow had moved on to the point where he envisaged the full realisation of the human person in the same “naturalistic, scientific sense that an acorn may be said to be ‘pressing toward’ being an oak tree” (Maslow 1959:130). He now situates basic need as the movement towards the more or less unconscious unifying goal of human self-actualisation. Crucially, he identifies that the failure to meet the basic need for self-actualisation leads to psychopathology. Maslow hypothesises that, contrary to the Freudians, evil natures are not basic to human personality, but that aggression, hostility, hatred and destructiveness are “an ever-present reaction to the frustration of basic needs”. He points out that professional psychotherapists as a matter of course “change and improve human nature, help people to become more strong, virtuous,
creative, kind, loving, altruistic and serene” as a consequence of improved self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Maslow wants us to understand what can be good in the human person, and where to find and actualise the source of that goodness. Variously called self-actualisation, self-realisation, integration, psychological health, individuation, autonomy, growth, maturation, creativity or productivity, this amounts to “realizing the potentialities of the person, that is to say, becoming fully human, everything that a person can become” (Maslow 1959:135). The fundamental importance of Maslow’s contribution is the recognition that there are both material and non-material basic human needs, common to all persons, and that these needs are concerned with human growth defined as increasing self-actualisation.

A second psychosocial approach to adaptive behaviour is Paul Sites and his 1973 work *Control, the Basis of Social Order*. It is in Sites’s work that the emphasis Marmot and Syme place on the social phenomenon of control is interwoven with this psychological understanding of basic human need. Sites builds much of his work on Maslow’s initial research, in particular Maslow’s 1954 work *Motivation and Personality*. Sites emphasises the development and definition of need in the context of childhood socialisation. He ranges across the work of Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, and out to the fringes with Erich Fromm, and also draws on authors examining the animal precedents of human behaviour – Robert Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative*, and Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*. His purpose in so doing is to establish the fundamental and even potentially genetic nature of need, and the existence of both material and non-material aspects to need. Although Durkheim and Parsons do not specifically discuss basic needs, Sites infers needs from their conclusions. Thus, he sees that Durkheim’s characterisations of anomic, egoistic, altruistic and fatalistic suicide having their explanatory framework in needs such as identity, security, attachment and stimulation. Contrary to a functionalist view of the relationship between persons and society – which stresses the “assumption of the a priori existence of a social system to which (individuals and/or groups) supposedly adapt” (Sites 1973:1), maintaining the system over time and granting little autonomy to the individual – Sites concurs with Maslow in seeing culture as an adaptive tool with an evolutionary purpose, “one of whose functions is to make the physiological emergencies come less often” (Maslow 1943:374). Culture is regarded by Sites as the means evolved to ensure that as many basic needs as the environmental field permits get regularly and reliably met.
Central to Sites’ s thesis is the concept of control, or “power in action”, whereby the individual, either on his own or in coalition with others, attempts to control the situational context by controlling the behaviour of others as well as his own, thus making control the most important dynamic of social as well as individual life (Sites 1973:1).

Control replaces the concept of adaptation, while maintaining a developmental and evolutionary approach. Based on Ardrey and Morris, Sites argues that increased control of the environment increases potential survival possibilities, and that “the individual seeks to control the environment (physical and social) in order to obtain gratification of his needs and to maintain himself” (Sites 1973:3). In contrast to a functionalist approach that treats the developing human as a tabula rasa who is socialised to the needs of society through internalising his or her norms and values from parents and others, it is the dialectical dynamic of control that is significant. The infant’s behaviour can be said to control the parent as much as the converse is also true. Sites is concerned about the apparent circularity of such reasoning, and therefore posits that the needs we are talking about “must be understood as standing outside of a particular society” (Sites 1973:33) – that is, that they are universal human needs. What is apparent in Sites’ s concern is that it is essential from a theoretical point of view to separate needs from wants. If any intensely felt desire becomes defined as basic, the utility of the basic needs approach is undermined, tending towards social or cultural relativism as socially determined wants become increasingly defined as needs. Sites acknowledges that there are many ways for individuals and collectives to meet basic needs within particular social situations, so that while the need remains fundamental, the social recipes for its gratification are potentially very varied. So, rather than seeing norms, values and culture in a functionalist or normative way, Sites establishes that these should be viewed instead as tools and opportunities the individual employs to meet basic needs. Sites posits the individual as theoretically prior to society, and his notion of control as basic to individual and social interactions means that the individual “uses, and indeed at times produces culture for the sake of himself and significant others, as he defines them” (Sites 1973:11). Citing evidence from studies of delinquent gangs, he suggests that the best evidence of this is the willingness of individuals to engage in deviant behaviour, in spite of the social cost involved. Society is only useful to the individual to the extent that it can be used to meet basic needs, and that
it conquers him only to the degree that his needs are met or to the extent
that he sees the possibility of meeting his needs within its context,
calculated in terms of the potential cost of going outside (Sites 1973:11).

In this sense, tradition is not a static norm that is implanted in the individual by
society, but instead is recreated anew with each generation as needs and their
gratification are renegotiated through communicative action.

In the context of Aboriginal Australia, control and narrative emerge as vital issues.
Reflecting on 10 years of research, the James Cook University team comment that
Aboriginal people who have participated in Family WellBeing

understand empowerment as a social action process in the context of their
lived experiences: healing/coming to terms with past and present situation;
dealing with the pain; gaining control; becoming strong; finding your voice;
participating in change; and working together for a strong community
(Bainbridge et.al. 2011:16).

Noongar man Kim Scott, twice winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award for
Australian fiction, and associate professor in Indigenous health at the Curtin Health
Innovation Research Institute, said in a radio interview:

I feel like we’re on the cusp of important narratives. We’ve played over a
few decades with – in my mind, I think of there’s a Stolen Generation
narrative which is very important. There’s a continuity narrative which is
much to do with Native Title. I’d like to think there’s a whole recovery
narrative which is to do with healing for all of us, and we’re yet to begin
articulating that sort of thing (Scott 2011).

Family WellBeing, based initially on the experience of Stolen Generation persons, and
now employed in the public health field in relation to suicide prevention, drug and
alcohol abuse and counselling, employs the framework of basic human need to provide
one means to grow this narrative of recovery and healing.

4.2.4 Participatory Action Research

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, a background in participatory action
research (PAR) provided the framework for writing these chapters, engaging the
author in a cycle of action and reflection. A variety of nomenclature is used to identify
research that is engaged with activity by the research subject. The use of participatory
action research here is taken from the Southern tradition, which defines PAR as a research methodology which

claims to further change processes in constructive non-violent ways due to its emphases on awareness-building processes [...] Such processes of radical change include scientific research, adult education and political action combined (Fals-Borda 1987:329).

The term Participatory Action Research serves to emphasise the three fundamental aspects of these “change processes”. First, it must be concerned with “the who, the what and the how” of participation, as discussed in Chapter 1. Genuine participation engenders personal responsibility and demands of the self that action be taken. Thus, secondly, PAR must be concerned with the specific actions that will follow from participation. Taking action to change the circumstances under study is an expression of power over, or control of, one’s circumstances. Finally, it is concerned with knowledge and its creation, which is the purpose of research. Integrating the native epistemology of the group is essential to create valid knowledge that can be the basis for action. What this view shares with participatory principles in public health is that it is cyclical and iterative; it builds on existing strengths and resources, including the psychological resource of narrative; and it is a long-term process with a commitment to consistency.

In the public health field, it is this tradition that is drawn on by Minkler and Wallerstein in Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (Minkler & Wallerstein 2008). CBPR is defined as a collaborative approach to research [...] CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change to improve community health and eliminate health disparities (Wallerstein & Duran 2006:312).

The Empowerment Research Program draws extensively on the work of Nina Wallerstein in the way it understands and operationalises empowerment research (Bainbridge et.al. 2011). For its practitioners, CBPR is not a particular methodology but rather a set of “principles”, a “philosophy” or an “orientation”. In the tradition of Saul Alinsky, for whom “the word ‘academic’ is a synonym for irrelevant” (Alinsky 1969, quoted in Stoeker 2008:107) organizer Randy Stoeker clarifies this by seeing that the problem is definitional: there is difficulty in being more concrete because academic thinking is based on “a conception that CBPR is a research project. It’s not.
It is a social change project of which research is one piece” (Stoeker 2008:111). Tsey concurs. Speaking of work with the Yarrabah men’s group, he says the project “is not academic investigator driven research” (Tsey et.al. 2002:279).

Examining the principles of CBPR set down by Barbara Israel and others (Israel et.al. 2008), most problematic is the definition of “community”. Whilst agreeing that community is a unit of identity, CBPR here relies on identifying predetermined communities of identity, defined geographically or by, for example, identifiers such as lesbian or gay, Hispanic or black. This approach has its roots in a traditional public health methodology. The case studies presented here show that the systematic application of processes that build empowerment actually creates the community, which self-defines. When it comes to empowerment, in the first instance the community is a group that comes together with the intention of coming to agreement on action to address a discontent.

This is a particularly useful perspective in Aboriginal Australian “communities”. Often, as for example in Yarrabah, a group of geographically co-located Aboriginal people may not in the first instance (or, indeed, ever) see themselves as having common interests that would serve to define them as a community. Mission reserves were the place where people of disparate nations and clans were swept together by force, not by choice. When the Aboriginal “community” self-defines, it may be different in different circumstances. While some cultural obligations will draw together warring factions, the possibility of inducing change and innovation through “becoming empowered” draws together in the first instance those who see that the responsibility for change already rests with them (Mitchell 2000; Tsey et.al. 2002).

4.3 Summary

There is good evidence that the empowerment methodologies and techniques employed in the Pacific organisations are broadly applicable in Aboriginal Australia. However, there are also significant differences that arise from the particular environment of Aboriginal Australia. Australia is a country where the colonisers did not go home, and continuing colonisation maintains an active and direct effect on individual lives, families and communities.

Organisationally, like the Pacific, in Australia there is a reliance on the presence of voluntary organisation or existing self-management structures to provide a platform for community entry. The background research for the present study, and the ERP/FWB case study, show that Australia is well behind the Pacific in terms of there being a
body of experience and evidence to draw on to promote empowerment as an intervention. There is also a lack of mature relationships with funding agencies – that is, ones where there is a level of trust that provides scope for trial and error, and where there is long-term commitment to achieving outcomes.

In this context, the Family WellBeing program shows a greater emphasis than the Pacific groups on the self as the thematic object of investigation. This is achieved through a learning framework rooted in a conception of basic human need. These basic needs are both material and non-material, and so central to human functioning that there are health and behavioural consequences if they are not met. The concept of basic need provides an open-ended and aspirational framework with the telos of self-actualisation. In addition to this framework, the FWB learning process places emphasis on resilience – that is, dealing effectively with frustration in the face of initial failure – and generic problem-solving abilities. The most basic expression of this is to say that in every life situation, there are choices.

This approach of using basic human need as a framework for critical consciousness, referred to above as “making the self thematic”, was the initial marker by which the author identified the ERP/FWB program as one that may share other important characteristics with the Pacific groups and their practices. As these case studies have shown, this program does share many important features in common with the organisation and program methodologies profiled and analysed in the previous chapters. Basic human need was a theme introduced from an international development perspective in Chapter 1. Design of the Development Wheel, or the very durable Social Cosmology Chart and “Question Man”, drew on Galtung’s ideas about basic human need. Galtung too considered basic human need as an important unifying concept. In Galtung’s “Goals, Processes and Indictors in Development” (GPID) project, participatory action research also appeared as a methodology employing basic human need as a guiding concept. In the current chapter, a very closely allied idea has been employed as a participatory action research tool in a primary health-care setting.

This chapter concludes the presentation and analysis of the case study organisations and their programs. As was said at the outset, there was intentionally no definition of empowerment and other important language used here in the opening parts of this thesis. The purpose was to examine how these organisations organize, and to seek out those characteristics that they share as groups and programs. These characteristics have been related to relevant theoretical interpretations.
The following chapters, which form the second part of the present study, will use the material now developed from the case studies to respond to the central issue raised by Rappaport and Zimmerman in Chapter 3, that of empowerment as a “multi-level construct” that necessarily brings together the fields of psychology, organisation, and social change.