



## Seeking a Pedagogy of Difference: What Aboriginal Students and Their Parents in North Queensland Say About Teaching and Their Learning.

Lewthwaite, B.E., Osborne, B., Lloyd, N., Boon, H., Llewellyn, L., Webber, T., Laffin, G., Harrison, M., Day, C., Kemp, C., & Wills, J. (2015) in *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40 (5). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n5.8>

Lewthwaite et al's research paper "*Seeking a Pedagogy of Difference*" presents the results from the first phase of a three-phase initiative to "*support a move towards a better understanding of teaching quality*" (p. 134) from an Indigenous Jarjum and parent perspective. The researchers note the divergent voices around what works to support disadvantage through quality teaching. Hattie (2009) is a significant voice but what is absent from Hattie's work is an acknowledgement of the deeper role of culturally located teaching practices. In contrast Sarra (2011) notes the importance of "*links between schools and the everyday realities of Indigenous peoples' life practices, histories and cultures*". Lewthwaite et al propose a strengths-based approach to develop "*Culturally Responsive Pedagogies*" (CRP) (Perso, 2012) or a "*pedagogy of difference*". The underlying premise of CRPs is that learning experiences reflect, validate and promote students' culture and language, and the role of the school is to understand the cultural context and respond appropriately for the benefit of each student.

### Research results

Although culture-based education is rhetorically premised as the foundation of North Queensland classrooms, the researchers questioned what classroom environments and teacher practices look like if they are truly reflective of Aboriginal students' histories, preference and circumstances. The research took the form of semi-structured interviews with students and families with the purpose of listening to the Indigenous voice on how teachers can support student learning. The results were synthesised into five themes for the family voice and seven themes for the student voice.

### The family voice

Family responses (parents and caregivers) almost "*exclusively pertained to systemic issues...*"

<b>Our history</b>	<b>Code switching</b>	<b>Inability to change schooling</b>	<b>View of Indigenous students</b>	<b>Affirm cultural identity</b>
Understand that our experiences with education may have been negative	We actively seek ways to inform and equip our students for the school culture	We have little influence on the ways schools operate	Believe our Jarjums are capable and give them the best opportunity	See our Jarjums as culturally located individuals with a self-belief as a learner

## The student voice

Students' responses tended *to be associated with tangible expressions of such issues in teachers' practices*

Relationships	Cultural bridges	Literacy	Make learning clear	Differentiate learning	Variety	Support
We value caring and positive relationships with teachers	We need a connection between school and our life world	Understand that we need to relate differently to languages at school	Make the intended learning clear. Listen as well as talk	Understand our different needs and have high expectations	Use a variety of practices, make learning relevant	Build positive relationships as a foundation for learning

### Implications for policy and researchers

- ▶ Listening to and representing the Indigenous voice creates a better balance and deeper research insight, and a cultural affirmation which is often absent from 'close the gap' discourses.

### Implications for schools and teachers

- ▶ Effective teaching practices occur where teachers accept they can be central players in fostering change. Culturally responsive teachers alter their beliefs to regard students and the cultures they represent as assets. They use the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference and performance styles of students as a lens for reconsidering their teaching.

### The Stronger Smarter Approach

The Stronger Metastrategies are reflected in this research:

- ▶ **Positive sense of student identity:** The research centred on the Indigenous family and student voice
- ▶ **Positive Indigenous leadership:** The research gives agency and voice to Indigenous leadership as research investigators and as interviewees.
- ▶ **High-Expectations Relationships:** Student responses showed the importance of positive relationships and high expectations.
- ▶ **Innovative and Dynamic School Models:** The innovation in this instance relates to the support of the Catholic Diocese to test their rhetoric in relation to Indigenous education.

For more information, see the Stronger Smarter Institute's full research review of the Productivity Commission's report, and more details about the Stronger Smarter metastrategies on the Institute's website at [www.strongersmarter.com.au](http://www.strongersmarter.com.au) . Contact us at [enquiries@strongersmarter.com.au](mailto:enquiries@strongersmarter.com.au).

### References

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- Sarra, C. (2011). *Strong and Smart – Towards a pedagogy for emancipation: Education for First Peoples*. New York: Routledge.
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