Stronger Smarter Institute
Research & Impact Footprinting

Reading Review

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

Stronger Smarter Meta-Strategy links:

1. Positive Sense of Cultural Identity → 2. Embrace Positive Indigenous Leadership → 3. High Expectations Relationships → 4. Innovative and Dynamic School Models

This Reading Review links to recent research in Indigenous education undertaken by a research team led by Brian Lewthwaite based at James Cook University in North Queensland. The research team includes Stronger Smarter Alumnus Ms Tammi Webber who signalled to the Institute the importance of this ground-breaking work in the field of Indigenous Education. The research is unique in that it comes from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' and families' perceptions of what constitutes quality teaching. The research uses the experiences and rich thick text descriptions shared by Indigenous participants to discuss a 'pedagogy of difference.'

Contents of this Review

Page numbers throughout this review refer to the Lewthwaite Research Paper. The term 'Jarjums' is used as an Aboriginal word for children used in a number of languages on Australia's eastern coast.

Overview

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*" (p134) from an Indigenous Jarjum and parent perspective. The first phase of the research focuses on closing the gap of research on Indigenous perceptions of what works for teaching and learning of Indigenous Jarjums. This research resulted in the development of an Effective Teaching Profile, which will be tested with teachers in the last two phases of the research.

Lewthwaite et al begin by outlining the 'state of play' in education, citing the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) ranking of Australia as a 'low equity-high quality education performer (McGaw, 2006). Lewthwaite *et al* note that there is evidence of perpetuating inequity in school outcomes and divergent voices around what works to support disadvantage through quality teaching. They note that Hattie (2003, 2009) is a significant voice which "*Identifies teachers and their teaching as a major source of variance in student's achievement*" (p.133). Hattie challenges teachers to '*know thy student.*'

However, Lewthwaite et al note a significance absence in Hattie's work in the lack of any acknowledgement of "*the deeper role culturally located teaching practices… are likely to have in improving student learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*". The quantitative work Hattie so expertly defines on "teacher effect" and the accompanying list of teaching practices are, as Lewthwaite *et al* see it, "*applied in isolation from the social and cultural context*" of the learner (p. 133).

Lewthwaite *et al* cite Professor Sarra's (2011) work on making "*links between schools and the everyday realities of Indigenous peoples' life practices, histories and cultures*". At the Stronger Smarter Institute, we know this as applying the 'Stronger' part of the Stronger Smarter philosophy. Our first Stronger Smarter meta-strategy deals with '*…a positive sense of identity in schools*'.

Ignoring these linkages, connections and differences and treating all students as equal occurs in the strict regime of a "*pedagogy of indifference*" (Lingard, 2007, p.132). Lewthwaite et al propose the challenge of ending the cycle of silence and othering of the Indigenous voice and taking a strengths-based approach to create a "*pedagogy of difference*" (p. 133). This means developing "*Culturally Responsive Pedagogies*" (CRP) as described in Perso's (2012) research from the Menzies Institute on (p. 133). The underlying premise of culture-based pedagogy is that the learning experiences provided for Jarjums should reflect, validate and promote their culture and language. The role of the school is not to ignore or replace the understandings and experiences Jarjums bring to the classroom, but to understand the cultural context and respond appropriately for the benefit of each student.

Contexts, Methods, and Modes of Inquiry

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. This formed the basis of their research with the driving research question "*What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members identify as the teaching practices that influence their learning*?"

This research explores two major international studies in Canada (Lewthwaite et al., 2014) and New Zealand (Bishop & Berryman, 2010) as a theoretical basis, and then draws on the experiences of the research team and locally based educators to ground the research in an Indigenous Australian context. The two international studies provide a valuable platform for the North Queensland research, as both place authority on students' and their communities' abilities to identify and communicate what influences their learning. The Canadian study focuses on Inuit and First Nation communities and their learnings. In New Zealand Bishop's work on Te Kotahitanga includes an Effective Teaching profile "*for teachers of Maori students based on operationalising interaction and pedagogical practices*" (p135). The researchers also link to the African-American literature and application of responsive pedagogies developed to deliver better outcomes for '*underserved students*' (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012).

The research was carried out in the Catholic Education Dioceses in North Queensland which cover the areas of Townsville to Mt Isa. This research applies to all jurisdictional sectors from Early Years through to Pre-Service Teaching. An integral part of the study is a testing of the success or not of the Queensland Catholic Education Commission's obligation to develop sustainable procedures to produce equitable outcomes for its Indigenous students (p. 137).

The methodology used was a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. A core component in PAR is "*Listening to each school community and its members in approaching the research in a manner that is seen as appropriate by each school's Aboriginal staff members*" (p. 137). The research took the form of semi-structured student interviews with individuals and groups across four schools and individual and group interviews with families. All conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed. A rigorous thematic analysis process involved open coding to identify and code significant quotes and undertake a thematic analysis.

This questioning of practice from an Indigenous perspective "*Purposely 'problematizes' teaching, upsets the orthodoxy of classrooms and encourages teachers to query the nature of student-teacher relationships*" (p. 135). Lewthwaite surmises, "*CRP draws into question, challenges and intentionally seeks to change existing social and political structures*" (p. 136).

Results

The research coding of conversations resulted in the development of a number of themes which interrelate and connect with each other from a family and Jarjum perspective. Families and Jarjums perceptions and experiences of teaching offer invaluable insights into the areas of increased success and 'pedagogies of difference'. One significant finding is the "*distinct difference in the content of the responses that came from parents as compared to students*" (p. 139). Family responses (parents and caregivers) almost "*exclusively pertained to systemic issues… whereas students tended to be associated with tangible expressions of such issues in teachers' practices*" (p. 139).

In reporting on their research, Lewthwaite et al weave very strong relational storying of participants' perspectives. They use a powerful positioning of the Indigenous voice from the researchers by purposely privileging family voices over the academic discussion in their research writing. This draws on already established Indigenous Australian process of upsetting the academic paradigm and privileging Indigenous voice (Davis, 2016; Martin, 2008; Nakata, 2007).

In our review, excerpts of these comments are shown under the themes below.

Family voices

Theme One: "Understanding … Our History".

> *It takes a long time to build that trust. Why should I trust* [because our past would tell us not to]?

At the forefront of responses was parental desire for change in education and for an understanding that their experiences in education have largely been negative, and as a result it can take time to build trust with the current school system.

Theme Two: "Understanding… 'Code-Switching'".

> *I tell my children that to be successful at school they have to 'be' a certain way."*

Parents understood the nuance of what is needed for success in schools, not just academically but socially – for instance in terms of language protocols. Parents understood that student's home culture was discontinuous with school culture, and they actively sought ways to inform and equip their Jarjums for the school environment.

Theme Three: "Understanding… Inability to Change Schooling". '

> *You really feel like you are at the mercy of the school and the teacher. You don't have any say.*

Parents' comments gave evidence of their conscious awareness of the invisible mechanisms of control by which all schools operate, which caters to the aspirations and patterns of the dominant (Western) society only. They felt they had little influence on the way schools operate.

Theme Four: "…Hold an Alternate Point of View of Indigenous Students…"

> *Just to believe they are capable and not to ignore them. You really want [teachers] to give your child the best opportunity.*

Apparent in family voices was their hope for their children's education and for teachers' positive perceived views of their children. The researchers note that this is not always the case, and that at the heart of many school systems' thinking is an assumption that Western ways are superior and that Aboriginal students may bring deficits to classrooms, not assets.

Theme Five: "Wanting Schooling and Teaching to Affirm Cultural Identity." '

> *It starts when you see [Aboriginal] people working at the school. Then you think that your child can go there because you feel confident they will be looked after.*

Participants asserted their want for formal curriculum to be the vehicle for the development of personal attributes. Parents were looking beyond academic success to include the whole child as a culturally located individual, and with a self-belief in themselves as a learner.

Student voices

Theme One: "Positive relationships as a foundation for learning".

> *I think she's a good teacher because she gives you time. She's not bossy. But she's not soft.*

Students focused responses strongly on the need for caring and positive relationships – relationships that supported, expected, challenged and affirmed, and were responsive to the individual.

Theme Two: "Cultural Bridges to promote learning".

> *When you know the teacher is interested in you, you are willing to share {stories} about your family [history] and other things.*

Student responses showed an imperative for continuity and connection between school and students' life world. Effective teachers confirmed the worthiness of the community.

Theme Three: "…Literacy demands of School".'

> *It's like she knows what words will give you trouble. She doesn't make you feel stupid, just really supportive.'*

Students were aware that they required a new way of relating to and using languages at school. Effective teachers drew on student's funds of knowledge as a scaffold to this high-status cultural capital accessible in school through literacy. Specific focus on literacy acquisition strategies enhanced student success.

Theme Four: "Learning Intentions Are Made Clear".

> *"I like her teaching when she keeps the important information up front. Really to the point. Everything is 'code-switch' for us."*

Making clear the intended learning was very important for students. Listening was seen as important as talking.

Theme Five: "Teaching is Differentiated".

> *"You pick up on whether a teacher places importance on me learning"*

Effective teachers accommodated rather than assimilated students in classrooms. Students mentioned the importance of high expectations of behaviour and student performance. Scaffolding learning experiences with appropriate time allotted for feedback and checking-in was seen as important.

Theme Six: "A Variety of Practices".

> *"I only liked geography because he made it really relevant"*

Students identified over 20 teacher practices attributed to learning. Areas of most impact were explicit learning intent, time provision to gain mastery of learning, assessment variety, personal and timely feedback, story-telling and narratives, focus on 'work to an end' type projects, literacy and numeracy focus to build fluency, and cultural background as a centre not an outlier for learning.

Theme Seven: "…Support and Monitor".

> *"It's more about what she's like. You go into her class and you're going to work and learn. In another class you aren't going to work and learn [it is decided unconsciously by students before we get there]"*

Students mentioned the significance of relationships and expectations as being the cornerstone for positive student-teacher interactions. Students talked about non-learning environments where teachers were reactive to students off task behaviours and didn't build positive relationships. Student comments signified the importance of a strong relational foundation to the formal curriculum learning experiences, as this could be the predetermining influence on learning.

A Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)

This researchers have used these themes to develop a North Queensland CRP which they call the "Effective Teaching Profile" (Figure 1). Categories of thought identified in the CRP were developed by Catholic Educations' Aboriginal community as "*representative of a responsive pedagogy of difference for its members*" (p. 150). The intent of the Profile is to provide a tool which acts as a bridge or connector for teachers coming into far north Queensland Catholic learning communities.

At the core of the CRP is the assertion that the lack of "*educational success can derive from… the inability of schools to meet the learning needs of their Indigenous citizens through the experiences offered and pedagogies used in classrooms*" (p.136). The researchers note that this is a clear difference from other far northern Queensland pedagogical practices such as Direct Instruction (Pearson, 2011), where a CRP needs to be personalised rather than uniform, and advocates a learner-centred approach grounded in context.

The researchers note that most of the effective teaching practices mentioned in their study are also captured by Hattie's work and pose the question as to whether these practices are good teaching practices for all students or are unique to Aboriginal students. However, they also note significant points of difference between the characteristics of effective teaching described by participants in this study that are missing from Hattie's work and from the literature in general. Firstly the literature shows an absence of the "*explicit mention of pedagogies that respond to the cultural norms and histories*" (p153).   Also silent or undervalued in the current national discourse on teacher effectiveness is the clear need for the formal curriculum learning experience to be underscored by a strong relational foundation and grounding in an ethic of care.

The researchers note that the behaviours of a CRP, or *pedagogy of difference* relate not only to what is taught, but how teaching unfolds. The research, as a celebration of Indigenous family and student voice, signifies that participants had a conscious awareness of how deficit or low-expectations thinking could impact on Indigenous peoples, at a school level and a community level. At the heart is the importance of a teacher's beliefs and understandings about their students and the community. The researchers suggest that teachers "*can bring about change by adjusting their practices*" (p. 154).

Effective teaching practices occur where teachers accept they can be central players in fostering change   Teachers can then work collaboratively towards an environment where practices acknowledge the cultural capital which students possess and the culture of schools they students are trying to negotiate. When teachers alter their beliefs to regard students and the cultures they represent as assets, rather than attributing blame, they are able to respond to students and positively influence their learning.

Culturally responsive teachers are effective by responding with agency to the cultural norms of the settings students represent. They use the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference and performance styles of students as a lens for reconsidering their teaching. They understand and mediate the discontinuity for Indigenous students between home and school and assist students in that transition. Effective teachers are not so much knowledge experts, but those who proactively seek genuine respectful relationships

Lewthwaite et al flag that the research on the North Queensland CRP is not intended as a replacement of the other studies on effective teaching such as Hattie's work. More to the point it is a *deepening of understanding* and *sharpening of teacher focus* on *culturally centred teaching*.

The next phases of research will look at teachers' responses and development with and toward the North Queensland CRP. In creating a disequilibrium, this research will see teachers "*pushed to seek resolution of these issues to move their classrooms to becoming more culturally responsive*" (p. 154). The ultimate "*influence of a pedagogy of difference is through making visible the experiences and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community*" (p. 154).

Figure 1: Characteristics identified as effective teaching practices for a Pedagogy of Consequence

Category	Description
What are my beliefs, values and understandings?	Teachers have the potential to effect reconciliation and redress educational inequities. Building trust is an imperative. An ethic of care is the foundation for all teaching practices. Teachers believe that all students can achieve to the level expected for their age, despite, and also due to, a diversity of knowledge, culture, language brought to school from home. All students are regarded as having the capacity to learn. Knowledge of the legacy of Australia's educational history and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on curriculum content endows teaching with respect, humility and flexibility. Awareness of community aspirations for their children's education informs teaching.
What characteristics of relationships contribute to learning?	The teacher's role is to facilitate learning; this is achieved through respectful, positive and warm interactions with students. Teachers communicate their regard for all dimensions of learning, including social development, not just academic achievement. Teachers can demonstrate their care for students through verbal and non-verbal interactions outside of the classroom, and pursuit of high expectations in the classroom.
How can building cultural bridges facilitate learning?	Valuing students' cultural identity includes showing respect for students' home language and knowledge, family and community, values and beliefs. Furthermore, local community members and cultural knowledges and values are welcomed into the classroom and used to scaffold children's learning. Education about oppression and authentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are included in the curriculum.
How do I teach literacy?	Literacy is taught from a foundation of spoken language. Code switching between Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English is explicitly taught. Students are orientated to age-appropriate texts before reading; then reading strategies and writing are taught and repeatedly modelled in context. In addition, literacy is taught across the curriculum as the vocabulary, language features and text features of each curriculum area are explicitly taught. Shared reading is common. Visual images are commonly used to prompt conversation before textual reading.
How do I make my teaching explicit?	Expectations of students both in behaviour and achievement, and the direction of future learning are clearly and repeatedly communicated to students. The knowledge and skills needed by students are explained and modelled in a variety of ways especially through concrete example. Constructive feedback is regularly given to students as they learn. There is a tendency towards explicit instruction, emphasizing a gradual release of responsibility, but inquiry-based learning is encouraged, especially in regards to student initiated questions and ideas.
In which ways do I differentiate my teaching to accommodate student diversity?	All students are unique so multiple learning trajectories and experiences that cater for a variety of learning preferences are provided. The teacher establishes individual goals for student achievement, gives individual feedback and provides intervention for students not meeting expected achievement. Gifted students are identified and supported for extended learning even if literacy levels are low. Individual strengths of students are used as foundations for supporting collective learning.
What are my practices for causing learning?	The teacher behaves as a learning facilitator rather than an authority figure and students are given choices, open ended, experiential, group and outside activities from which to learn. The use of narrative to provide context for learning is frequent. Visual imagery is used to prompt engagement and support learning. A holistic approach is usually taken, in which information and skills are chunked and scaffolded, and connected to prior knowledge. Students are provided time to gain mastery of skills, to reflect and to self-assess, especially through tasks that involve working to end type products. Individual feedback is given and learning success is celebrated. Communication of ideas, especially abstract tasks, occurs orally when students are engaged physically with learning tasks. Explanation of ideas is succinct. Teachers under-talk rather than over-talk.
How can I support and advance student behaviour?	Students contribute to the setting of classroom expectations, which are clearly and consistently communicated to students. The encouragement of cooperative behaviours, engaging and accessible tasks and use of routine decrease the need to manage student behaviours. Off-task behaviour is managed promptly with less provocative techniques such as non-verbal, proximity, pause and wait, close talk (private reprimands) or group reprimands. The learning expectations of classrooms are not compromised by misbehaviour.
What is my role in supporting student health and wellbeing?	Student health and wellbeing underpin academic and social development. Students with individual needs, such as hearing loss, have access to support services. Strategies advocated by specialists are enacted in the classroom. In addition to creating a supportive learning environment, vigilance in detecting the need to refer students to specialist services is the essence of an ethos of care.
How does the school context in which I teach assist learning?	Indigenous staff that are positive role models and engage with students and family are critical members of the school. Schools support teachers' pursuit of student academic and social outcomes by providing an accessible process by which students and community can be included in school decision making. Schools provide staff time to visit families at home and organise cross-cultural training from community Elders. Strategies to maximise student attendance at school include facilitating student re-enrolment and transitions from other schools and supporting students' educational pathway. School administration provides professional development for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teacher aides to maximise their teaching roles. School provides access to cultural peer support and role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Summary

A pedagogy of difference

▶ Lewthwaite et al draw on research from Inuit and First Nation communities (Lewthwaite et al., 2015) and the New Zealand context, specifically Bishop and Berryman's (2010) work on Te Kotahitanga.

▶ Lewthwaite et al propose the challenge of ending the cycle of silence and othering of the Indigenous voice and taking a strengths-based approach to create a "pedagogy of difference". This means developing "Culturally Responsive Pedagogies" (CRP) as described in Perso's (2012) research from the Menzies Institute on (p. 133).

Privileging Aboriginal voices

▶ The **research question** for this study is "What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members identify as the teaching practices that influence their learning?"

▶ Results were developed through thematic analysis. What became or developed as significant themes of the research were the "distinct difference in the content of the responses that came from parents as compared to students" (p139). Family "exclusively pertained to systemic issues…" Themes developed like "Understanding Our History" & "Understanding… Inability to Change Schooling". Students "…tended to be associated with tangible expressions of such issues in teachers' practices." These 'tangibles' included themes like the need for teachers to build "Cultural Bridges" & "Teaching (being) Differentiated."

An Effective Teaching Profile for North Queensland

▶ Lewthwaite et al flag that the research on North Queensland CRP is not a replacement of studies like Hattie's. It is a **deepening of understanding** and **sharpening of teacher focus** on **culturally centred teaching**. The point of difference in Hattie's work is that it does not acknowledge "the deeper role culturally located teaching practices… are likely to have in improving student learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students" (Lewthwaite et al., 2015, p. 133).The CRP Framework's significant point of difference is the "explicit mention of pedagogies that respond to the cultural norms and histories".

▶ This research shows the impact and conscious awareness participants had on the deficit or low-expectations thinking some teachers and then schools have on Indigenous peoples.

Recommendations and Provocations

Representing the Indigenous voice

- The Indigenous voice is central to this research providing an important representation of the voices of the most researched yet less studied and that is the actual voices of Indigenous families and Jarjums. There is a dearth of Indigenous Education literature of and on Indigenous voices and perspectives in education. Like the way Yunkaporta's work filled a void of Indigenous Australian pedagogical practice and application processes (Yunkaporta, 2010), Lewthwaite et al provide a space where the research interfaces are meshed or entwined with the Indigenous voice.

- The research models of deepening of relationships through providing spaces to yarn and connect as well as having key Indigenous Chief Investigators involved in the planning and delivery were integral to the research. Policy and program developers looking to deepen their insight on and of 'what works' in Indigenous Education should review closely the application of the types of method and research techniques used in this study. Inclusion of these types of Indigenous voice, Indigenous-centric studies creates a better balance, a third cultural space (Davis, 2016; Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta, 2010) of research insight and cultural affirmation which is increasingly left from 'close the gap' discourses.

- The thematic analysis provides an insight into how pedagogies and how hegemonies impact and influence Indigenous student construction. Although situated within a specific regional context this has applications across jurisdictions and population areas.

- The provocations of the next phases of research, teacher responses and development with and toward CRP will be poignant full circle research development and delivery of and for developing greater equity for our Indigenous Jarjums and families.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is missing from the literature

- Lewthwaite's and other CRP research basis were glaring omissions from the PC Report on Indigenous Primary School Data, June 2016.

Meta-strategy links

This research connects with four of the five Institute meta-strategies;

- → 1. **Positive Sense of Cultural Identity** – The centre of the research is Indigenous family and Jarjum voice.

▶ → 2. **Embrace Positive Indigenous Leadership** – By using a PAR approach, agency and voice is given to all Indigenous leaderships whether in the interviewee phase or as Chief Investigating Officers of the research.

▶ → 3. **High Expectations Relationships**: A foundational part of developing a Stronger Smarter Approach, High-Expectations Relationships are is re-imagined in this instance through the agency of teaching. Jarjums responses indicate the importance of teachers developing positive, caring and high expectations relationships with their students.

▶ → 4**. Innovative and Dynamic School Models**: The innovation in this instance relates to the trust and supportive development of the Catholic Diocese to test their rhetoric in relation to Indigenous education and then the enactment and development of research from within the Catholic Education field in North Queensland, problematizing issues of visible teaching through school participations in the study.

Other relevant research

There are three readings that connect to this research in our Institute review:
  (i) *Seeking a Pedagogy of difference*: What Aboriginal Students and Their Parents in North Queensland Say About Teaching and Their Learning (Lewthwaite *et al, 2015*).
  (ii) *A Pedagogy of Difference* – Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) Framework
  (iii) *Effective Teaching Practices for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Students*: A Review of the Literature.

This review is linked to the first of these.

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