

WERA IRN

Indigenous educational disparities and pedagogical practice to gain equitable educational outcomes for Indigenous school age students Framework

Title

A meta-Synthesis of qualitative research on pedagogical practices needed to engage Indigenous school-age students.

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Executive Summary

For decades, there has been a consistent stream of research and statistical evaluation highlighting the under-achievement of Indigenous students in western educational institutions. Over the last 40 years, much research has been conducted in an attempt to understand why so many Indigenous students experience difficulties in school. Several features of the educational system have been identified as potential contributors to this problem. Including poor attendance rates, low expectations of Indigenous students learners, poor quality relationships between schools and Indigenous communities, lack of engagement of Indigenous students in schools and the quality of the pedagogical practices to engage Indigenous learners to their education. Over the last 40 years, much research has been conducted in an attempt to understand why so many more Aboriginal students experience difficulties in school. Several features of the educational system have been identified as potential contributors to this problem. Some of these features will be examined and the arguments of the Indigenous pedagogical theorists will be highlighted to support the justification of adapting the pedagogical practices in many western educational institutions to engage with preferred pedagogical practices that have been identified that engage Indigenous students.

Background

When examining the outcomes of Indigenous students globally in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts there appears to be a gap in the achievement of equitable educational outcomes. Using PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) as a standard that many OECD (Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development) Nations participate in as an international educational comparative survey to measure for their student populations' educational standards fro 15 year-old students. In figure 1., I have used the most current public data the PISA 2012 results to compare some of the Nation States and their comparative Indigenous populations. The major failing in this task was only two Nation States attempt to isolate their Indigenous populations results for comparative measures (Lietz, Darmawan, Rigney, Halsey, & Aldous, 2014). In the following table I will highlight Australia and New Zealand overall results and include the Indigenous populations for comparison. The other Nations States that are identified also have Indigenous populations that their Indigenous populations results have not been separated. These include USA, Canada and four other Nations that the Sami populations' also identify as home countries, Finland, Norway, Russian Federation and Sweden.

	Mathematics	Reading	Science
Australia	510	517	526
Australian Indigenous	423	434	446
Difference	- 86	- 83	- 80
New Zealand	500	512	516
Maori	452	466	469
Difference	- 48	- 46	- 47
USA	481	498	497
Canada	518	523	525
Finland	519	524	545
Norway	489	504	495
Russian Federation	482	475	486
Sweden	478	483	485

Figure 1. PISA 2012 Mathematics, Reading & Science results

This data was used as a starting point to consider if there is a need for appropriate pedagogical practices to be engaged with when working with Indigenous school-age students. For the last 40 years many Indigenous pedagogical theorist have argued that when working with Indigenous students specific pedagogical practices need to be understood and employed to engage Indigenous students into the educational environmental practices. These understandings that have been examined in this report will highlight many of these Indigenous pedagogical theorist arguments about specific practices and why they are significant in engaging Indigenous students in their education.

Pedagogical Differences

What pedagogical practices have been recognised as engaging for Indigenous

students?

Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and academics have highlighted Indigenous pedagogical theories over the last 50 years. They have argued for the need to change pedagogical practices to include the needs and learning pedagogies of Indigenous students into teachers' educational practices when trying to engage Indigenous students to their education. Many of these theorists highlight some specific pedagogical practices that would support Indigenous students learning, some of these practices include;

- The need for aspects of recognition of Indigenous culture.
- Relationship development with Indigenous student including the teacher and the school.
- Localised content through Indigenous community engagement and placing the learning in context to Indigenous society, Indigenous worldview and Country.
- Use of group and peer supported learning.
- Adapting the learning environment to be safe and free from racism.
- The engagement of dynamic teaching practices to support various preferred Indigenous-learning styles.
- Allowing Indigenous students to be responsible for their learning with some level of self-determination and cultural authority.
- Acknowledging the use of reflective learning.
- Removal of low expectations or 'deficit thinking' towards Indigenous students.

To build upon these ideas I will emphasis these features in greater detail throughout this chapter.

Recognition of Indigenous culture

Many Indigenous pedagogy theorists have recognised that the inclusion of Indigenous Cultural Knowledge (ICK) is a necessary pedagogical feature to engage

and improve Indigenous school-age students' educational outcomes (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Donovan, 2015; Keskitalo, Maatta, & Uusiautti, 2011; NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004; Yunkaporta, 2009). ICK is ever present in an Indigenous household it is part of everyday activities, some of these activities are easily recognised but at many times it is the subtle or covert understandings that are underlying within actions that are aspects of cultural knowledge. This presentation of ICK is continuously imparted to Indigenous children; Heitmeyer (2004) highlights this in stating,

“Education can be considered one of the principle means by which culture and knowledge are transmitted from one generation to the next. Aboriginal societies had an education system with their own teaching methods as a means of transmitting knowledge about the land, history, kinship, religion and the means of survival. Younger generations learned from older generations by participation, observation and imitation” (pp. 222-223).

The presentation of aspects of Indigenous culture to Indigenous students will help connect these students to the learning experience by placing that learning experience into context to the Indigenous learners worldview. So ICK should be placed at the centre of the learning to support Indigenous students engagement with the learning experiences. Gay (2000) highlights the significant need to engage with the students' cultural knowledge when working with culturally diverse learning spaces such as those that include Indigenous students',

Culturally responsive education recognizes, respects, and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments. Being culturally responsive is more than being respectful, empathetic, or sensitive. Accompanying actions, such as having high expectations for students and ensuring that these expectations are realized, are what make a difference. (p. 3)

Heitmeyer (2004) suggests that when using ICK in a classroom you can gain the best with Indigenous students. Hudsmith (1992) reinforces these comments in her work where she suggests that successful teachers of Australian Aboriginal students include aspects of Aboriginal experience and knowledge. Hudsmith highlights these actions in her research where she notes teachers with good relationships with Australian Aboriginal students' were,

“Providing meaningful contexts in which teacher and students negotiated learning content, methodology and processes. They were highly relevant to student past and future experiences and incorporated affiliative and autonomous aspects of Aboriginal social life” (p. 5).

These teachers incorporated aspects of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge (ACK) to “affirm his student’s Aboriginality, the uniqueness of their history and heritage” (Hudsmith, 1992, p. 10) not just as an addendum to their work but embedded Aboriginal social life into their classroom activities as a social norm to the classroom not as a unique or special feature. The support of cultural differences need to be included in western educational settings as Castagno and McKinley Jones Brayboy (2008) highlight,

The transmission of dominant cultural knowledge and norms occurs on a daily basis in U.S. schools, and the consistent message in much of the research is that successful teachers of Indigenous youth also work to transmit values, beliefs, knowledge, and norms that are consistent with their students' home communities. (p. 960)

The recognition and inclusion of Australian Aboriginal culture in schools has been consistently argued by many Aboriginal pedagogical theorists as a way to support Aboriginal students (Donovan, 2007; Harris, 1987; Harrison, 2011; Heitmeyer & O'Brien, 1992; Hughes, More, & Williams, 2004; Malin, 1994; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; National Aboriginal Education Committee, 1985; Perso & Hayward, 2015; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Through the inclusion of cultural knowledge in schools

Indigenous students will engage with school content. The limited development of using ACK can be identified as a form of 'deficit thinking' due to the victim (Aboriginal society) being blamed for poor success, not the structural problems within the system failing Aboriginal students (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Nakata, 2007).

This argument of presenting the cultural knowledge of Indigenous students' has been argued across many Indigenous students populations globally. Some Indigenous pedagogical theorists have argued for the need to organise more 'culturally responsive schooling' to improve engagement of Indigenous students to the classroom and their teachers educational practices (Barnes, 2013; Bernstein, 1997; Bishop, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Kanu, 2007; Keskitalo et al., 2011; Ma Rhea, Anderson, & Atkinson, 2012; Munns, O'Rourke, & Bodkin-Andrews, 2013; Ogbu, 1982; Peacock, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As Castagno and McKinley Jones Brayboy (2008) highlight,

“Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth has been widely viewed as a promising strategy for improving the education and increasing the academic achievement of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in U.S schools...[but] it has had little impact on what teachers do because it is too easily reduced to essentializations, meaningless generalizations, or trivial anecdotes” (pp. 941-942).

In Australian society as a whole knows very little when it comes to Aboriginal society, history and culture. With Aboriginal society being removed from much of the history of Australian society. The early presentation of Aboriginal People was directed towards a romantic savage image, but they were represented as savages' non-the-less. By presenting Aboriginal People in a non-civilised, savage, framework allowed the invasion of Australia by British and later Australian society to progress with little guilt placed on the society that benefited from these actions. These Australian historical views lead to Aboriginal People being pushed aside and forgotten as historians managed the image of Australian society as historians saw fit. Some Australian historians though recognised this gap in Australian history and have

recently been trying to inform Australian society about Aboriginal history (Goodall, 1996; Maynard, 2007; Parbury, 2005; Reynolds, 1999; Wilson-Miller, 2003).

The recognition of ICK is a significant factor for Indigenous students through engaging them to the learning space and normalising their culture within the foreign environment of western educational systems. With the consistent presentation of aspects of ICK within our curriculum all students will value and gain some understanding of Indigenous culture and society. Recognition of ICK is important to Indigenous students and the recognition will support Indigenous students in participating with their teachers with the development of an authentic relationship to engage Indigenous students to their classrooms, schools and curriculum.

The importance of the teacher and Indigenous student relationship

The establishment of an authentic or honest relationship between the teacher and the learner is a mandatory pedagogical feature when working with Indigenous students. Indigenous pedagogical theorists have not just identified this understanding but other educational pedagogical theorists strongly identify the importance of relationship building between the teacher and all students (Bernstein, 1997; Boomer, 1982; Dewey, 1916/ 1966; Ladwig & King, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Halse highlights this when stating, “Children of any cultural background who feel personal connections with their teacher are likely to be more cooperative, interested in learning, and willing to take risks and attempt new tasks” (Halse & Robinson, 1999, p. 208). The importance of this can be identified in traditional Australian Aboriginal communities through to contemporary Aboriginal society where the connection between the student and the teacher is founded on an intimate and personal basis. The 1985 Blanchard report on Aboriginal education highlighted this when examining a traditional Aboriginal education system stating that,

“Early education of Aboriginal children was undertaken by those with whom they were intimate and kin. It was only later in life...that verbal instruction was given in a more formal and structured way, and that information was imparted

by people who were strangers or relative strangers” (Blanchard, 1985, p. 6).

The first education in for many Indigenous households like in most communities was through the immediate family. Members of their immediate community participated in this personalised form of informal education. In a contemporary sense this close-knit network can remain within many Indigenous households particularly those that still maintain a close kinship network until the student enters school (Heitmeyer, 2004). The stepping away from this personalised network and entering into school is generally the first step into a formal education setting for most Indigenous children as entering into pre-school settings are generally less for Indigenous students’. So working with unfamiliar people outside their kinship based network prior to formal schooling can be just one of the challenges Indigenous students encounter when entering into a western school setting.

The development of a personalised relationship between the teacher and student could limit this divide and allow the student to become more comfortable with this foreign environment. Aboriginal parents in the NSW 2004 Review of Aboriginal Education highlighted this feature stating,

“A teacher’s relationship with their Aboriginal students is really important and it must be built on the foundation that the teacher understands and acknowledges the Aboriginal student, their life experience and their language” (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 78).

The development of a personal relationship between students and teachers is an important aspect of working with Indigenous students. As aspects of Indigenous cultural practices, kinships relationships and behaviors’ or socio-economic status that is present in most Indigenous households may differ from wider Australian households. So Indigenous students may feel isolated in schools as if it is a foreign environment. West (2000) highlights some negative manifestations that can occur due to difference in cultural experience highlighting in one of his case studies,

“The skills and characteristics of the Aboriginal students which were positively valued, or simply considered normal, at home became irrelevant or disabling in school because of the contrasting cultural practices.... This conflict gradually developed into a vicious cycle where the students became marginalised both socially and academically. The non-Aboriginal students tended to follow the teacher's lead...She was unable to recognise or respond to their zest for learning, their resourcefulness and ingenuity, and their awareness of and concern for the needs of other students.” (West, 2000, p. 213)

This difference that the Indigenous students brought into the classroom should be engaged with through the teacher working with the Indigenous students in a personal or connected manner. If the teacher engaged with the Indigenous students and not straddling this cultural divide then a relationship of understanding could develop towards expected behaviour of the classroom including collaboratively connecting the diverse pathways of their experiences together (Bishop, Ladwig, & Berryman, 2014; Donovan, 2011; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Swisher and Deyhle (1989) argue these understandings for other Indigenous student population when they comment that "American Indian students come to learn about the world in ways that are different from mainstream students." (p. 4) The standing with feet in both worlds' is a common statement that many Indigenous pedagogical theorists have argued. Lewthwaite and McMillan highlighted this principle of engaging Indigenous students through the combination of recognising the students' culture and western knowledges when they stated that,

Teaching with reference to both [contemporary and traditional knowledge] just strengthens the richness of the experience provided for students. It's not a matter of being obligated in doing so. One without the other just reduces the richness of experience for children. (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 146)

Through a development of a personal relationship with Indigenous students, teachers should be able to connect to these students through sharing aspects of

their life and culture working to develop the class into a cross cultural space (Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Donovan, 2009; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010). Thus engaging with the difference between students and supporting a greater holistic education space for all students. The relationship between the teacher and the Indigenous students is foundational in the engagement of the Indigenous students to the classroom, curriculum and the teacher. When engaging with Indigenous students through this relationship the teacher must also extend this relationship into their community so as to engage with the Indigenous students cultural practices, their community and their view of the world.

The schools' relationship with the Indigenous community when engaging the Indigenous learner

When working on effective relationship building with Indigenous students the understanding that Indigenous students see themselves, as part of a larger community more than as individuals' needs to be understood (Battiste, 2002; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Donovan, 2007; Edwards, 1988; Heitmeyer, 2004; Kanu, 2002; Nakata, 2007; Sarra, 2011; Smith, 1997). This means that to effectively connect with Indigenous students the students need to see that the local Indigenous community is also engaged with their school.

This concept is strongly supported across various institutions' that engage with Indigenous communities in education. This can be seen in the policies of the Australian government's 'Closing the Gap' directions (Council of Australian Governments, 2014), the 'Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians' (Ministerial Council for Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) and through different State governments individual education policies. These policies constantly mandate the need to work with the Indigenous community as equal partners in the education of Indigenous students and the presentation of Indigenous education to all students from decision-making through to practice.

The NSW Department of Education and Community (DEC) and NSW Board of

Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) have committed themselves to mandatory engagement with local Indigenous communities in supporting any Indigenous education initiatives and in the correct presentation of Indigenous content in schools. This concept of involving the Indigenous community has had greater incentive since the NSW 2004 Aboriginal education Review that emphasised the limited knowledge of Indigenous society and engagement with Indigenous communities,

“It must be acknowledged that a number of non-Aboriginal people working in education and training are apprehensive of working with Aboriginal people. This “fear factor” is related to not wanting to say or do something that is inappropriate or culturally offensive, a lack of knowledge and understanding about Aboriginal people and lack of opportunities to have meaningful conversations and interact socially with Aboriginal people.” (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 95).

The most effective way of presenting understandings about Indigenous society is to engage the Indigenous Community to discuss all aspects of Indigenous education in school in partnership with the local Indigenous community or Indigenous community organisations like the NSW AECG. Then some localised informed content could be presented to inform all students about Indigenous society. This can be very important in urban Indigenous Communities where the common view that the ‘real Aborigines’ relates only to Indigenous Communities in remote settings (Behrendt, 2006). This image tends to be supported by the Australian media and political parties who appear to focus greater attention on remote isolated Indigenous Communities (Langton, 1993).

As Cootes-Trotter on behalf of NSW Department of Education & Training (DET) stated in the launch of the NSW AECG/ DET Partnership agreement, “The renewed agreement is built on the principles of ‘respect, commitment, collaboration and accountability’ and outlines a shared goal where Aboriginal learners ‘have access to

an education and training system that values their cultural heritage and identity” (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2010, p. 3). This partnership agreement reinforces the strong belief that there is a need for positive change in engaging Indigenous students and informing all students about Indigenous society. For this to occur there is a need for ACK to be presented within schools and for educators to engage with Indigenous students in meaningful ways.

Partnerships with the local Indigenous Community are the most beneficial way to gain Indigenous Community knowledge for Indigenous students and all students in a classroom. But partnerships with Indigenous Peoples’ are not a simple one-off event. A partnership is more than an agreement; it is a request for both parties to work together in a reciprocal agreement and develop a relationship to improve the educational experiences for their Community (Donovan, 2011). The NSW BOSTES reinforce this partnership when they state, “The sharing of knowledge is a two-way process...Quality consultation requires respect, trust and openness, with a focus on building a partnership with Aboriginal people that is equal and genuine” (NSW Board of Studies, 2008, p. 4).

A partnership with an Indigenous Community becomes a reciprocal relationship. A reciprocal relationship is a relationship where both parties give to the partnership for the benefit of both parties in a constant cycle. An example of this partnership is when an Indigenous Community member is asked to speak to students on local history or a story from the local Indigenous knowledge systems (Dreaming). Many members of the Indigenous Community see this as a way to help the Indigenous students at the school through incorporating Indigenous Community knowledge into their school experiences and sharing in their children’s education.

If possible many Indigenous People will give this freely to the students, partly because it is their responsibility to educate their children about elements of their culture but also to inform all students about the knowledge’s of Indigenous society. With Indigenous society this sharing of knowledge becomes a gift and establishes a

reciprocal behaviour with the school, teacher or students. So if the teacher or school does this as a one-off event and not attempt to continue this new relationship or invite the Indigenous Community member back to become involved with curriculum content, this relationship or trust could be ruined. Many Indigenous Communities are disenchanted with the shared respect that should be part of the educational process and they may step way from participation with the school and discredit the school to other Indigenous Community members because of this lack of respect to their established reciprocal relationship (Munns & McFadden, 2000).

Through effective engagement by teachers and schools with Indigenous communities, partnership can be developed to support the engagement of local ACK to support all students gain a better understanding of Indigenous culture from a localised perspective.

Placing the learning in context

Western schools are seen as foreign spaces to many Indigenous students. This is due to many Indigenous students not recognising themselves or their culture in the school or classroom. Langton states that, “a culture is 'felt' as normative, not deviant. It is European culture, which is different for an Aboriginal person” (Langton, 1993, p. 36). The issues of difference maybe identified in a variety of positions, including place and Indigeneity, cultural interface, Indigenous epistemology, disempowerment, country or recognition of Indigenous society in an Australian contemporary space.

Place is of great importance to Indigenous communities. It is an aspect of the communities' identity and group affiliation. The landscape is seen as a 'sentient' aspect of the groups' knowledge base that speaks to the community supporting its health, growth and development. Battiste highlights this in relation to Indigenous communities through identifying that,

“Every conception of humanity and education begins from a human body in territory and a consciousness in which a specific place takes prominence. This

locale shapes an understanding of existence over time in that place and sustains the people, providing them with an understanding of themselves and an awareness of their being at home in the world” (Battiste, Bell, Findlay, & Youngblood Henderson, 2005, p. 8).

This use of the landscape or place to engage and inform Indigenous students is a tool that has been identified by many Indigenous pedagogical theorists, such as Hughes (2004), Heitmeyer (2004), Sarra (2011), Donovan (2011) and Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009). As Yunkaporta et al highlights this issue by stating “...the theory is strongly place-based as most Indigenous knowledge is grounded in long-term occupancy of land and is indivisible from place” (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009, p. 15). The connection that teachers should examine when working with Indigenous students is the Indigenous connection to the local environment by the local community. These understandings should then be able to extend the classroom into the Indigenous students known world and to connect those students to the learning. But the use of these understandings will inform all students about the local area from an Indigenous standpoint giving all the students a wider view of their local environment. With the use of a different view of the world it will reinforce that understandings can be observed and understood from different standpoints. As Heitmeyer states,

“The learning environment has to take into consideration the differences that Aboriginal children bring with them into the classroom. (These differences are not problems but assets for all members of the class, including the teacher). To educate all students about Aboriginal Australia” (Heitmeyer, 2004, p. 228).

This boundary of bi-culturalism is something that many Indigenous people experience almost every time they leave their home or community and venture into wider Australian communities. Many Indigenous people highlight it as a difficult experience particularly when relating to schools (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 136). Indigenous parents see the importance of school but their children’s Indigenousity is

just as significant to them. This foreign environment or culturally different environment can become a place of friction between teacher and student because of this bi-culturalism. An Indigenous parent when talking about their child's education highlighted this issue stating that,

"I want my children to be proud of being Aboriginal and I want them to be educated. It shouldn't have to be a choice between the two. Too often teachers see our kids as a problem to be fixed and the solution is to make them more like the white kids. It doesn't work" (NSW Board of Studies, 1997, p. 30).

Nakata (2002) identifies this boundary as the 'cultural interface'. It is an expression of the bi-cultural interactions that Indigenous people need to work within when they step out of their culturally safe environments into wider Australian culture. These cultural boundaries vary from place to place and from the various experiences or understandings that Indigenous students and teachers present to each other. Nakata (2002) identifies that classrooms can be seen as a foreign space to Indigenous students with a need to acculturate these spaces through acknowledging Indigenous identity, Nakata states that,

"These are conceptual frameworks that seek to capture a form of culture that fits with Western ways of understanding 'difference'; a cultural frame-work largely interpreted by Western people in the education system and filtered back to Indigenous students who learn or are allowed to express the acceptable little bits and pieces of their culture that are integrated into educational practice." (Nakata, 2002, p. 285).

Nakata highlights the importance of understanding or working with your current students to understand their knowledge of Indigenous culture and work with their knowledge base not your understandings. In doing so to build an accurate cultural space that these students can effectively relate with. It is a place of partnership where both parties need to learn from each other to produce a positive outcome. But as teachers are the leader in this school environment it is their responsibility to take

the initial actions to develop an effective cultural interface.

The need for teachers to gain a local knowledge base to view the world from the local Indigenous standpoint can only benefit all students. By teachers positioning themselves from this Indigenous viewpoint they will inform all students about Indigenous Australia from the localised starting point of the students known world (Yunkaporta, 2009). This is a position that NSW DEC mandates in their 2008 Aboriginal Education and Training Policy (AETP) (NSW Department of Education & Training, 2008) and the Australian Government supports in their 'Closing the Gap' actions (Council of Australian Governments, 2008). Through engaging with this local viewpoint it will allow an Indigenous epistemology to be presented to engage with the Indigenous understandings of their world. As Dodson reminds us,

"We (Aboriginal peoples) have our own unique ways of knowing, teaching and learning which are firmly grounded in the context of our ways of being. And yet we are thrust into the clothes of another system designed for different bodies, and we are fed ideologies which serve the interests of other peoples."
(Dodson, 1994).

Through teachers positioning themselves in context to the local Indigenous worldviews of place they will engage their Indigenous students and open themselves up to gaining a localised Indigenous perspective to the schools environment that may not have been visible to the teacher previously due to their own cultural filters. For teachers to achieve this they must engage with the expert knowledge that is part of the local Indigenous community. To achieve clear localised context teachers should follow local protocol to effectively engage with the local Indigenous expertise (NSW Board of Studies, 2008). Through effectively achieving reciprocal partnerships with the local Indigenous community the teachers will be able to engage with the local Indigenous expertise to support all their students understanding of Aboriginal Australia (Donovan, 2007; Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). The NSW DET 2010 Partnership Agreements' also demands the development of appropriate community partnerships between schools and the local Aboriginal community (NSW

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2010).

Battiste (2005) informs us of the need for these partnerships when educating all students. These standpoints can present a more complete history through the inclusion of viewpoints that have not been recognised by dominant cultures but are still lived experiences by members of Indigenous communities. Battiste states,

“In looking at our collective histories, we hope to account for current educational policy and its impact on Indigenous peoples, while taking ourselves to the doorways of understanding, discovering new possibilities, other strategies, and new sources of power and strength. From this place we create space for revisiting the past, re-ordering the present, and facilitating a sustaining future” (Battiste et al., 2005, p. 14).

Placing learning in context to an Indigenous worldview is more than reading a Dreaming story picture book from the school library. If the teachers are going to extend themselves professionally to engage their audience and give the students a meaningful taste of Indigenous culture then the learning and content needs to have some value. This value is best achieved through clear relationships with the local Indigenous community where this partnership is based as equals working together to inform all students about the wealth of Indigenous cultural and knowledge systems held in country (Battiste et al., 2005; Donovan, 2007; NSW Board of Studies, 2008; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009).

Through achieving this teachers would show that local ACK is an important teaching element within their curriculum and highlighting the value of Indigenous students own culture. Thus highlighting that recognition of culture is important within their learning space and thus engaging across appropriate pedagogical practices that have been recognised as supportive of Indigenous learners.

Group and peer supported learning

A common practice stated when working with Indigenous students' is the need to use a group or peer orientated learning space to best engage with Indigenous students. Many Indigenous pedagogical theorists have called for this educational practice since the 1980's through to contemporary times (Donovan, 2002; Halse & Robinson, 1999; Harris, 1987; Harris & Marlin, 1994; Harrison, 2008; Heitmeyer, 2004; Hughes et al., 2004; West, 2000; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). They have generally argued that due to Indigenous students worldview being community orientated that working within a group setting allows for peer support and confirms group identity (Johnston, 1991). Heitmeyer supports these views through highlighting that, "Aboriginal children value and feel more comfortable in a cooperative situation rather than in an aggressive, competitive environment" (Heitmeyer, 2004, p. 235). This identifies the inclusive nature of community identity that many Indigenous students connect too in a social and educational setting. Hughes reinforces this understanding through stating that, "the purpose of learning for many traditional Aboriginal people is primarily to benefit the group, not necessarily the individual" (Hughes & More, 1997, p. 29).

As the education system is a socialising tool developed by non-Indigenous society it may not completely engage with Indigenous students. Coombs, Brandl and Snowden (1983) agree with this understanding stating that,

"Aborigines receive an education designed consciously and unconsciously...to assimilate them into the wider society; an education which is not congruent with their own cultural values. This lack of congruity is evident in the curricula, in the social relationships required in the school, in the style and methods of instruction, in the attitude towards language and in the way performance is assessed" (Coombs et al., 1983, p. 186).

This position of educational environments being social settings has been well examined and discussed across the late nineteenth and twentieth century (Bernstein, 1990; Bishop et al., 2010; Boomer, 1982; Dewey, 1940; Freire, 1972;

Gore, 1993; Ladwig, 1996; Ladwig & King, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Dewey emphasis's this during some of his work in the early twentieth century stating, "...the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself" (Dewey, 1916/ 1966, p. 45). Dewey is highlighting that education is a life-long lived experience and that we learn from all the experiences that we encounter. Indigenous students are no different but some of there lived experiences may be different to the greater lived experiences from the wider Australian community.

Some Indigenous pedagogical theorists have emphasised the use of a peer or group experience to allow Indigenous students to discuss understandings from their own personal space in a safe environment. So the Indigenous students can discuss the socialising examples or activities that are presented to the students in a school that may not relate to their known experiences safely. That would allow elements of their known world to be expressed through the narratives of the discussion (Donovan, 2002; Harrison, 2011; Heitmeyer, 2004; Hughes et al., 2004). This will allow Indigenous students to bring some of their examples of difference to learning experience and reinforce their culture to the learning concept.

Harrison (2011) argues that Indigenous students have a preference for the use of group work in their learning. He connects this group experience back to the group culture of Indigenous students and how they, "learn from each other as much as they learn from the teacher" (Harrison, 2011, p. 50). Cahill strengthens the position of safety of a group presence for Indigenous students stating that, "Aboriginal students are more likely to take risks when they are working within a group because there is perceived safety in numbers and the group engenders confidence to take risks" (Cahill, 1999).

Some teachers may note that when new tasks or concepts are presented to students many Indigenous students will start slowly with the task, observing what the other students are doing first before attempting the task. Halse and Robinson (1999) state that this is a normal process for Indigenous students as observation and imitation are

primary experiences to Indigenous students when building new skills or concepts. This form of peer-supported learning can work well in a group setting where the ideal of a collaborative workspace can be enforced around a small cluster of desks. This collaborative form of learning follows protocols that are present in many Indigenous households. But may be seen as disruptive in a class environment of individual workspaces.

Peer supported learning and group work based activities engage with foundational values of Indigenous society, that is Indigenous people visualising themselves as a part of a community not a group of individuals in the same space. Through the recognition and engagement of these core fundamental values of Indigenous culture within the classroom, Indigenous students will embrace these educational practices. With the recognition of aspects of Indigenous culture within the classroom Indigenous students may see that the classroom is a safe cultural secure environment.

Safe environment; free from racism

Racism is embedded within Australian institutions; this has been noted by many external International bodies that challenge Australian society in some of its policies and practices towards minority groups within Australian society (Amnesty International, 2010; Anaya, 2010; United Nations Committee on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination, 2000; United Nations Office for the High Commission for Human Rights, 2010). These comments are supported through some United Nations (UN) reports, reviews or complaints on Australian Governments' policy. Such as UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2000 after receiving Australia's last three late CERD reports,

“Serious concern remains at the extent of the continuing discrimination faced by indigenous Australians in the enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights...The Committee remains seriously concerned about the extent of the dramatic inequality still experienced by an indigenous population”

(United Nations Committee on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination, 2000, p. 4).

This level of discrimination towards Indigenous communities is not a recent phenomenon, influenced by current government policy but part of the institutional racism that is embedded within the foundations of Australian society. This level of foundational beliefs can be retraced to the invasion of Indigenous society from 1770 and extend beyond the 1992 Australian High Court decision that identified the myth of colonising Australia under 'Terra Nullius' (Brennan et al., 1992). The UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, in his report examining Australia's relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Peoples identifies this foundational discrimination level stating that he was,

“Concerned about ongoing effects of historical patterns of racism within Australian society and that their negative consequences continue to severely undermine the dignity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples...and resetting the relationship with indigenous peoples is needed to address negative perceptions within society...to create a healthy environment conducive to the enjoyment of rights and freedoms” (Anaya, 2010, p. 19).

These statements of International condemnation towards the discriminatory behaviour of Australian society was reinforced by the NSW DET in their 2004 Review of Aboriginal Education. Where the issue of racism was identified in the report from comments from the Department staff, teachers, students and the Indigenous community. This issue highlighted some of the effects that racism had on Indigenous students in their attendance and engagement with NSW schools. NSW DET recommended in the changing of behaviours of staff, students and policy in NSW schools. As the Review stated, “...the belief that incorporating the issues of racism, prejudice and reconciliation in school planning and policies was crucial to effective, ongoing social support for Aboriginal students and their families” (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 100).

The issue of discriminatory behaviour towards a specific school population can disenfranchise that population from the education process. If Indigenous students do not feel safe to express themselves or feel isolated culturally from their classroom environment then they may have great difficulty engaging with the teacher, other students or the educational tasks. Pearson (2000) tries to articulate the depth of the damage racist behaviour can have on Indigenous students when he states, “Make no mistake, racism is a terrible burden. It attacks the spirit. It attacks self-esteem and the soul in ways that those who are not subjected to it would have not an inkling of understanding about” (Pearson, 2000, p. 34). These understandings were emphasised through a variety of submissions to the 2004 NSW DET Aboriginal Education Review that discrimination was an inappropriate behaviour and needed to be dealt with by everyone, so students can have the opportunity to achieve at the highest levels. As the Review highlights,

“A number of submissions addressed the need for schools to change the way they operate to bring about a cultural shift to address overt and covert racism and that a whole school and whole community focus to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students” (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 105).

Malin identifies negative teacher attitudes towards Indigenous students and its effects on those students. She notes that the Indigenous students received less academic and social support but received higher negative or disciplinary treatment from their teachers’, “...the differential treatment of the three Aboriginal students resulted in their receiving less instruction and poorer quality instruction than other children” (Malin, 2003, p. 12). These behaviours Malin identifies as based on cultural differences between the teacher and the Indigenous students and reinforcing the racist stereotypes that are embedded within the Australian educational system. Malin emphasis this through stating,

“In a sense, these students’ opportunities for academic learning were bartered

for their 'good' behaviour, where 'good' behaviour was interpreted differently depending on the respective cultural backgrounds of the students and teacher. This exemplifies a form of institutional racism that is invisible to most of those concerned but creates a situation where Aboriginal students are seen by their peers to be incompetent academically and dissident behaviourally, reinforcing racist stereotypes that are commonly held in the wider society" (Malin, 2003, p. 12).

Battiste (2005) expressed this underlying discrimination in her description of institutional discrimination that she identifies as part of colonisation and how it deeply effects Indigenous populations,

"Such privilege allows its holders (non-Indigenous society) not to know or think about systemic inequality or their own role in sustaining inequality; they can then dissociate themselves from, and presume themselves innocent of, the cumulative appropriations and dispossessions that define systemic relations of domination" (Battiste et al., 2005, p. 10).

This issue of institutionally embedded racist attitudes is clearly argued within the literature but there is very limited arguments about protecting students who are affected by these attitudes. Much of the systems rhetoric about gaining a culturally safe environment is directed towards teachers participating in some level of cultural awareness training or teachers embedding some Indigenous perspectives within their curriculum. Both of these practices do not occur effectively within NSW schools. This is a very limited standpoint when dealing with racist behaviour as Bin-Sallik highlights, "Cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. It empowers individuals and enables them to contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes" (Bin-Sallik, 2003, p. 21)

One of the few academics to address these limited culturally safe positions within educational institutions is Bin-Sallik (2003). She highlights the importance of having a culturally safe space and practices within institutions as a protected environment

for Indigenous students to effectively engage within Australian educational institutions. Bin-Sallik believes that, “It is up to these institutions, with their collective capacity, to show that they have a moral obligation to deconstruct what they are responsible for constructing in the first place” (Bin-Sallik, 2003, p. 28). So the building of culturally safe curriculum and Indigenous spaces are needed to support the safety of students of difference within Australian society and schools.

Racism is evident across Australian educational institutions’ embedded within the institutional framework. Through positive pedagogical change such as the acknowledgement and engagement of ACK within teaching practice and curriculum then can Australian schools can become immersed in the reconciliation process. With the engagement of positive pedagogical developments teachers should engage Indigenous students within their educational practices.

Dynamic teaching practices

Many of the pedagogical theorists that have identified best practices for Indigenous students have suggested diversifying teaching practices to cater for the diverse learning preferences of Indigenous students. Through the understanding of diversity is where the dynamic teaching practices come into play. What I am suggesting by using the term ‘dynamic teaching practices’ is that teachers need to be changeable in their teaching practices to suit the diversity of their student audience. There is a need for some flexibility and learning interplay between the student and the learning activities to engage the Indigenous students in to the teachers’ curriculum understandings. Mellor identifies this by suggesting that teaching, “...involves a dynamic interaction between the students and the teacher. Teaching and learning is not a static process; it involves both groups actively changing and interacting with each other” (Mellor, 2004, 23).

These statements support the view that there is some identifiable Indigenous learning preferences. Many of the Indigenous pedagogical theorists have argued for specific teaching behaviours to be considered when working with Indigenous

students (Donovan, 2009; Halse & Robinson, 1999; Harris, 1987; Harrison, 2011; Heitmeyer, 1999; Hughes & More, 1997; National Aboriginal Education Committee, 1985; Sarra, 2011; West, 2000; West, 1994; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Hughes and More go on to define learning styles as,

“Intended to reflect the fact that individuals have greater competence with some learning processes or learning settings, and lesser competence with others. The sources of these competencies and their relationship to the nature of the learning task” (Hughes & More, 1997, p. 20).

By engaging in a variety of flexible learning practices and adapting your teaching practice to suit your student needs you will be able to increase the engagement of your students in your classroom. But engagement doesn't mean dumbing down the learning experience to make the Indigenous student appear more involved because they can work quickly through a simplistic task. Dynamic teaching practices may include more inclusive practices that allow interactive activities to explore the learning task and challenge the Indigenous student to find the meaning of the activity. This should allow a teacher to become more inclusive to get a better connection with their students and engage with their various learning preferences.

As many of the Indigenous pedagogical theorists have stated that when considering Indigenous students needs teaching expression may differ from many regular teaching environments. Heitmeyer suggests that,

“Koori children respond better to a physically based program rather than something static...Kinesthetic exercises help strengthen the link between the left and right sides of the brain and this improves Koori children's ability to adapt to different learning situations. That's what is needed to succeed in mainstream school environments” (Heitmeyer, 2004, p. 229).

As suggested some classrooms teachers who have trouble diversifying their teaching practices to engage Indigenous students may use simplified worksheets or

'busy work' to engage these students. This practice is noted as a wide spread behaviour to distract the Indigenous students and give them relatively meaningless tasks as a form of behavioural management. Hatton, Munns and Nicklin-Dent (1996) noted this wide spread dumbing-down practice of behavioural management by many non-Indigenous teachers working in communities with large Indigenous student populations. Mellor and Corrigan (2004) take this argument further by highlighting that such practices devalue the education process for these students, and presents western education as a meaningless, trivial practice. They state,

“A number of studies in the Indigenous education research have focused on teachers who have provided students with ‘busy work’ in response to the behaviour-management problems produced by setting challenging work...While this distraction strategy has short-term success in that it reduces problem behaviours in the classroom, it contributes to students developing a sense that school is not providing them any direction and the sense that there is no purpose in them going to school. It is important that there is classroom discipline so that children can learn, and, importantly, so that children submit themselves to the demands and rigour of formal learning” (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 23).

These pedagogical theorists are emphasising the aspect of difference between Indigenous students and mainstream Australian society. With the need to engage with this difference when taking into account the diversity of learners and engaging with this diversity as a benefit to the classroom experience not as a handicap.

Responsibility for their learning

Many of the learning experiences that are suggested by Indigenous pedagogical theorists that best suit Indigenous students originate back to the Indigenous value systems of a community based world-view. This worldview is different to the western concept of individuality that is dominant in Australian classrooms. Issues of peer learning or a classroom that is not an individual competitive space is a strongly

suggested learning practice when working with Indigenous students. As Heitmeyer highlights, “Aboriginal children value and feel more comfortable in a cooperative situation rather than in an aggressive, competitive environment” (Heitmeyer, 2004, p. 235).

Heitmeyer (2004) is suggesting that learning shouldn't be a competitive process because all learners come from different starting points in their learning pathways. So through competition then some students will quickly progress and others may get left behind. For Indigenous students the possible slower progression could be because they are working with their peers progressing together setting a pace that suits the group not the individuals of that group. This collaborative process suits many Indigenous learners.

The development of a collaborative interactive learning space where learners and experts (teachers) work together to achieve outcomes is another dynamic teaching practice suggested by some Indigenous pedagogical theorist (Bishop et al., 2010; Donovan, 2015; Heitmeyer, 2004; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011). This issue of interactive learning has been highlighted already by many of these Indigenous pedagogical theorists in the emphasising of peer based learning practices and the significance of the teacher and students. In this environment, everyone has the place to participate and bring his or her own learning experiences into the task to achieve the identified outcomes. These learning experiences must also have some concrete and contextual place to the learners, so the learning experiences will relate to the known worlds of the Indigenous learners. Bishop supports this understanding when working with Indigenous students stating that by,

“Authorising of students’ experiences and understanding can directly improve educational practice, in that when teachers listen to and learn from students, they can begin to see the world from the perspective of those students. This in turn can help teachers make what they teach more accessible to students” (Bishop et al., 2010, p. 70).

These experiences can be extended into more abstract learning later as the students extend themselves and increase their understanding of the objectives of the learning task.

The concept of presenting ideas as a global perspective or whole picture has been suggested as a positive format for many Indigenous students (Harris, 1980; Hughes & More, 1997; Perso & Hayward, 2015). This is a suggested best practice that Hughes argued would support Indigenous students worldview approach to their learning. Hughes states,

“The global (holistic) end of this spectrum, the student tends to understand best when the overall concept is presented first, when the overview is emphasised or when a meaningful context is important. The more analytic student tends to learn best when learning is presented in small parts, gradually building up to the whole, or when context is less important” (Hughes & More, 1997, p. 22).

This practice of highlighting a global view of a learning concept can be achieved in classrooms through initially presenting this global perspective. Then progressing by highlighting the smaller individual elements of the learning concept to achieve the overall task or large-scale idea. This simple diversity in educational practice would support both global and analytical learners.

Understanding the Indigenous worldview and engaging with it when working with Indigenous students is a practice that will bring Indigenous students into a learning environment. Through maintaining this learning environment as an interactive learning space will allow Indigenous students to engage within some of the well established learning preferences that have been highlighted by many Indigenous pedagogical theorists that engage with Indigenous students.

Questioning as a learning tool

A common trait within Indigenous culture is not to ask questions of experts, such as

children questioning Elders (Edwards, 1988). This causes some difficulties for teachers when working with Indigenous students. In the Western education system the asking of questions is a western classroom cultural norm and founding principle to gaining knowledge. Teachers who already know the answer will ask students the question to measure the students' level of understanding. But many Indigenous students have difficulties with this logic of learning because in their home-life experiences they can either wait to be directed to their next understanding or through interactive exposure they participate in an activity where some questioning can occur in context to the practice. These different learning experiences have been noted as part of Indigenous cultural learning practice (Harrison, 2011; Hughes et al., 2004; West, 2000).

The issue of questioning in Australian schools is important because it is a foundational structure of our schooling system. To cater for these cultural dissimilarities teachers can train Indigenous students to gain an understanding of asking questions as an important form of learning communication in context to their classroom. This is where a teacher emphasizes that in their classroom there is a need to ask questions. As Heitmeyer (1999), Halse and Robinson (1999) all state this can be developed with Indigenous students through clear guidelines and experiences for the students to slowly develop the skills and confidence to ask the expert (teacher) when they are unsure of what needs to be done.

Heitmeyer follows these lines of understanding when she states, "If the Aboriginal student is not given the skills in replying to questions either verbally or in writing they will not be able to succeed within the Western education system or compete for employment" (Heitmeyer, 2004, p. 235). This reinforces the responsibility of teachers to gain an Indigenous cultural understanding so they can use this knowledge to support Indigenous students to develop the appropriate skills to succeed within an Australian education system.

This different learning system can be a significant cultural misunderstanding between non-Indigenous educators and Indigenous students. Many non-Indigenous

teachers see this as a deficit of understanding by the Indigenous students (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gray & Partington, 2003; Harker & McConnochie, 1985; Perso & Hayward, 2015). An outcome of this is that many Indigenous students will be placed into the lower levels of school streams because they are deemed as not being intellectually inquisitive. Battiste, Bell, Findlay and Young Henderson (2005) recognises that the responsibility of increased knowledge of students' cultural differences lies with the teachers when it comes to supporting their Indigenous students' cultural differences, they state that,

“All educators need to recognise the Eurocentric ideologies that have shaped educational curricula and therefore their students, and recognise very different and legitimate ways of knowing and doing that are not now a typical part of the educational process...challenging grand narratives about how the world operates in education or is reflected to students and requiring consideration of all peoples, the diversities of culture and knowledge.” (Battiste et al., 2005, p. 13).

Battiste, Bell, Findlay and Youngblood-Henderson are emphasising that the societal institutions are social normatives that develop and conform the population as a homogenous group so any difference is ignored. But if teachers want to gain the best from their students these differences need to be recognised and embraced to engage all students to that learning environment.

Questioning is a learnt skill that does have cultural variations within our diverse Australian society. Teachers need to understand the possible cultural differences and engage with them to support their students. The use of questioning is consistent practice within Australian schools and needs to be taught to all students if this practice is a key element of a teacher's pedagogical toolkit. Through collaborative discussions and establishing the boundaries of the learning environment students with a cultural difference will learn to code shift into the cultural parameters' of any teachers learning environment.

Use of reflective learning

Reflective learning is a practice that has been noted within Indigenous society by both anthropologists' and educators when examining aspects of Indigenous culture. This practice relates to Indigenous learners participating in a learning experience initially as an observer than learning through some form of interactive learning either practicing the skill or participating under the guidance of an expert. The learner works as a participant in the learning experience watching the expert and then practicing the task privately not at the centre of the experience. This experience is practiced until they have some expertise in the task before publically performing these skills to others (Berndt & Berndt, 1964; Edwards, 1988). Indigenous pedagogical theorists have also identified that Indigenous students practice this in contemporary classrooms (Harris, 1980; Heitmeyer, Nilan, & O'Brien, 1996; Hughes et al., 2004; Malin, 1994). Heitmeyer relates this practice back to traditional Aboriginal culture stating, "In Aboriginal culture where learning is mainly done through listening and not interrupting, children will more likely develop a more reflective learning strength" (Heitmeyer, 2004, p. 228).

This reflective learning state is a cultural feature of many Indigenous communities. That is, Indigenous students will position themselves as part of their community, working and participating as part of the group. As group identity is the normal form of identification, very few individuals will step forward beyond the group. If an individual steps outside of the group they need to present themselves as an expert showing that they carry this new knowledge with authority. They will not position themselves away from the group unless they can defend that place, to avoid the concept of 'shaming' or embarrassing themselves. Hughes emphasises this point when he states,

"First, the student may develop a reflective style. That is, the student is slow to respond and thinks the answer through before responding, if at all. The motivation for the reflective way of learning may be to avoid embarrassment, shame and ridicule." (Hughes & More, 1997, p. 32)

Indigenous students will only present themselves away from the group if they have the confidence to show expertise in the identified task. But drawing an Indigenous student forward with individual identification can shame the individual and can be seen as a negative aspect of Indigenous culture. So there is a need to allow the Indigenous student to reflect on the learning and allow them the personal time to gain the confidence before targeting the student and drawing them away from their peers and as the central figure.

Shame is a powerful behavioural management practice within Indigenous communities. Teachers need to understand and acknowledge these cultural differences and embrace this difference to support the diversity within their classroom. Through allowing students time within our busy classroom schedules to reflect, discuss and work collaboratively will allow Indigenous students to progress with the learning outcomes within classroom. Through acknowledging this diversity as a different learning progression and not a deficit learning practice will benefit the engagement with Indigenous students.

Deficit Thinking and Indigenous students

A possible outcome of the poor relationships between Indigenous students and teachers could be identified through the low teacher expectations of Indigenous students. This feature has been consistently identified across many system reviews, Fitzgerald highlighted poor teachers' expectations of Indigenous students abilities as early as 1976 in his report into Poverty and Education in Australia (Fitzgerald, 1976). This issue was again identified by Johnston in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody in his report in 1991 (Johnston, 1991) and again in 1997 by Wilson and Dodson in the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Wilson & Dodson, 1997). With the poor teacher expectations of Aboriginal students was more recently identified in the 2004 NSW Review of Aboriginal education (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 85).

Richard Valencia defines 'deficit thinking' as;

- 1) A mind set moulded by the fusion of ideology and science;
- 2) A dynamic form of social thought allegedly accounting for between-group behaviours and
- 3) An actual way of thinking to combat problems [for example, imputation, top-down approach; paternalism] (Valencia, 1997, p. xi)

All of these defining points at various times have been directed towards Indigenous students and their inability as a cohort to succeed within a Western educational systems. Teachers often label Indigenous students as deficient and adjust practices to suit this distorted model that the teacher has established. The NSW Review of Aboriginal education highlights Beresford and Partington's work in this area. In which they point out that in relation to Australian education systems that,

"A 'deficit' view relating to Aboriginal students (although discredited by informed educationalists) persists and that while this may remove blame (from teachers), it does not provide educators with the knowledge and understanding to 'remedy the situation'" (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 69).

When examining Aboriginal students in the Australian education system, one issue that has consistently been identified is Aboriginal students limited success in our Western education system. Since early work in the 1980s researchers such as Harker and McConnochie (1985), Harris (1987) and Muir (1984) have suggested that Aboriginal students are at a deficit and their limitations will drag them down when it comes to a sophisticated educational structure. These limitations have been related to associated factors with the Indigenous community such as low socio-economic status, poor home environment, different cognitive development, parents' limited view of schooling, poor language skills, genetics and racist views from the School, community, students and teachers (Harker & McConnochie, 1985; Harris, 1987; Muir, 1984). Reynolds supports this with his observations on Indigenous education during the 1980s stating that,

“Researchers used the cultural deficit model to identify inadequacies in Aboriginal children and their families; therefore, a proliferation of compensatory education programs emerged to rectify their problems. These programs tended to be based on the premise that Aboriginal people suffered from 'cultural deprivation' or 'deficit' which had the effect of impoverishing their linguistic and cognitive ability. (Reynolds, 2009, p. 89)

The belief that Aboriginal students were at a deficit came from Australian societal understandings that had developed since 1788 and over the period of co-existence history with Aboriginal Australia. These beliefs saw Aboriginal society placed as a lesser population and in need of cultural improvements and civilisation (Fletcher, 1989; Parbury, 2005; Reynolds, 1999). These assimilationists' understandings of the 1940's and 1950's are still strongly embedded through the 1970's and right up to current day 21st century Australia. These embedded values within Australian society caused a power imbalance that favoured a cultural deficit explanation (victim blaming) that pathologises the lives and experiences of Aboriginal students. This maintains power over Indigenous students through non-recognition of Indigenous culture in classrooms due to its assumed inferior status. This deficit modelling is an outcome of the invasion and colonisation of Australia. As Bishop highlights' in comparison to Australia from a Maori experience, “The pattern of power imbalances is one of dominance and subordination and has developed as the result of the heritage of colonial dominance in this country” (Bishop et al., 2003, p. 5)

An example of the limited support for Indigenous society and culture can be identified in the very limited development of Indigenous perspectives and content within Australian school curriculum, school environments or classes. Presentations of aspects of Aboriginal culture are very, very limited within Australian curriculum and classrooms historically. With the level of current representation of Aboriginal knowledges' increasing but it is still notably limited.

In NSW public schools this should be noted as an important fact, due to NSW State public schools having had an Aboriginal Education Policy as part of the NSW Department of Education standard since 1982 and this policy becoming a mandatory policy in 1987 (Heitmeyer, 2004, p. 226). So in all NSW Publics Schools from Kindergarten to Year 12 Aboriginal perspectives and aspects of Aboriginal culture should have been presented across all curriculum areas, all schools and in every classroom since 1987. That should mean that there has been almost thirty years of NSW teachers mandatorily presenting aspects of Aboriginal culture and society to all students in State schools across NSW. Informing all students about the wonders and knowledge systems of Aboriginal society, the oldest continuous living culture in the world. But this has not happened as shown through various Aboriginal educational reviews (Australian Parliament, 2002; NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004).

In the engagement of any student, an understanding of the student as an individual including the students preferred learning behaviours should be developed to gain the best from any student. That is through developing an authentic relationship with the Indigenous student and engages the students' worldviews into the learning activities of the class. These practices should be integrated with high expectations of the students' worth to allow an enriching educational space with all the students' highest achievements as a common goal for all. This is not the expectation that has historically been placed on Indigenous students. Low expectations of Indigenous students academic success has been noted in various reports and examinations of Aboriginal students since the 1970's (Commonwealth of Australia, 1985, 1995; Fitzgerald, 1976; Johnston, 1991; NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004; Wilson & Dodson, 1997).

Griffiths, Amosa, Ladwig and Gore (2007) highlight this position in a NSW longitudinal pedagogy study from some comments with teachers that were collected from interviews. Griffiths et al highlights the low expectations this teacher has of Aboriginal students in her class and how she adapts these expectations towards these students. The teacher states that,

“So it's not so much that I've lowered my expectation of them but I've had to really cut down the way I talk to them and how I deliver things. So there's still an expectation that they work and that they do well but the work is heavily modified to suit them” (Griffiths et al., 2007, p. 10).

The surprising aspects of these statements are that they are coming from teachers who are consistently working with Indigenous students and have some understanding about the issues of engaging students through the use of quality pedagogy. Yet their own discriminatory views are still evident and change their teaching behaviours.

In NSW many Indigenous Communities members have stated that the expectations placed on their children by teachers have lead to very little support to their children in extending themselves in their learning situations. This type of comment is a regular issue being presented across the State to the NSW AECG at all levels of the organisation in local, Regional and State meetings. This was emphasised during the 2004 NSW Review of Aboriginal Education. The review team visited many sites across NSW interviewing school staff, Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Community members trying to gain understandings in relation to Aboriginal education in NSW schools. When asked many Aboriginal Community members stated teachers generally had very low expectations towards their children. The review states,

“Many Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal community people, when interviewed on Review field trips, made strong statements that schools were pushing our kids through with little or no support and that low expectations by teachers resulted in low achievements for their children” (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 85).

Deficit thinking towards Aboriginal students has been identified within Australian schools since the earliest colonial educational institutions until contemporary times. Teachers can accredit much of this behaviour to limited understanding of Aboriginal

cultural practice and their racist behaviour. The only educational professional in a classroom is the teacher. If students are unable to gain understanding from the teachers' educational practices then the deficit behaviour is coming from the educational professional (teacher) not the learner. Pedagogical practice is the foundational behaviour of all classrooms, teachers must understand and engage with good pedagogy across all learning environments to suit their students not expect the learner to be responsible to automatically engage with the teachers educational practices.

Previous Studies

Through examining the literature there are only two similar studies that have been identified. Much of my study design is based on the work of the first study that I have identified. Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman through the New Zealand school reformation practices called Te Kotahitanga initiated their study through firstly asking Maori students what was involved in improving their educational achievement. Through the gathering of a number of narratives of students' classroom experiences through 'Collaborative Storying' from a range of Maori students in mainstream schools. The students clearly identified the main influences on their educational achievement and told the researchers how teachers related and interacted with Maori students in their classrooms and how they could create a context for learning where the students' educational achievement could improve (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Through this position of self-determining research is how I will address the questions of 'What form(s) of pedagogy are necessary for increasing the engagement of Aboriginal school students'.

In an Australian context there has only been two studies where Aboriginal students were asked about their views of schools, teachers and what they found valuable in their schooling experience. One was completed in 1992 by Dr Basia Black-Gutman where she interviewed some urban primary school Aboriginal students (Gutman-Black, 1992). This work primarily was identified to support teachers to interpret Aboriginal students behaviour in class and attempt to communicate more

effectively with them. This work is aimed to inform teachers about urban Aboriginal Primary School students' behaviour and their likes about school. My study differs from Gutman-Blacks work in that through the collaborative storying or narrative of the students will inform the author about their understanding of the best teaching practices (pedagogy) that engage these high school Aboriginal students. Also the use of high school students was identified because these age groups of students are capable of articulating appropriate pedagogical practices that suit their learning preferences.

The early stages of a more recent research project has just been published in May 2015 where Lewthwaite, Osborne, Lloyd, Llewellyn and Boon from James Cook University partnered up with Webber, Laffin, Kemp, Day, Willis and Harrison from the Diocese of Catholic Education, Townsville (Lewthwaite et al., 2015). This study interviewed Aboriginal students, Aboriginal parents and some Aboriginal teachers involved in up to five Diocese schools about their educational experience's in formal and informal settings in trying to develop an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) for working with Aboriginal students. This research uses a similar narrative style interview discussion as we both acknowledge Bishop's work with Maori students (Bishop et al., 2003). But it differs in that Aboriginal parents as well as students are interviewed in the development of an ETP not just engaging with the Indigenous students as Bishop maintained in his work and Lewthwaite acknowledged as presenting a very different pedagogical focus (Lewthwaite et al., 2015, p. 139).

There are only a few cases globally that target Indigenous school students and their view of their education from the students' point of view. Three studies have been identified in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and in the USA. The Aotearoa study by Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman called Te Kotahitanga was a research and professional development project that seeks to improve the educational achievement of Maori students in mainstream secondary schools. Their study developed a foundational standpoint through firstly asking Maori students what they believed should be involved in improving their educational achievement. From there the researchers

developed an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) to better engage the Maori students standpoint on good teaching practices when working with Maori students (Bishop et al., 2003).

As 90% of Maori students attend mainstream schools the authors' focus was to engage Maori students within mainstream schools. They selected five schools from a variety of schools that self identified to participate in the study and interviewed students, their family (whanau), school Principals and teachers. They spoke to seventy Maori students grouped in Years 9 and 10 from the five different schools. They gathered narratives of these students' classroom experiences through 'Collaborative Storying' between the students and members of the Maori research team. The students identified the main influences on their educational achievement and explained how teachers changing the way they interacted with Maori students in their classrooms could create a context where students' educational achievement could improve (Bishop et al., 2003).

The use of collaborative storying when engaging with the Maori students was of great benefit in this study because it allowed the students to tell their stories with their own words. One significant benefit the researchers found from asking Maori students was,

“Not only were all of these students able to clearly identify the main influences on their educational achievement (both positive and negative), they were also able to clearly tell us how their educational achievement could be improved” (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 3).

The students gave insights on their educational experiences but for some students they could verbalise the importance of their education in relation to being Maori today in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and establishing Maori self-determination. Bishop et al note this position when they acknowledge that,

“Despite reporting that their experiences with education were overwhelmingly awful, year after year, these students understood and were still optimistic about the possibilities that education offered them. They and their whanau were emphatic about education being an important way forward to a positive future” (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 255).

From the discussions with the Maori students there was a range of issues identified including aspects of Maori cultural ignorance such as mispronunciation of Maori student names and not allowing them to wear their taonga (special Maori body ornaments). The students spoke of racist behaviours of teachers such as focusing on negative stereotypes towards Maori students. With teachers engaging only on negative interactions with good behaviours being ignored and teachers seeing Maori students as underachievers and causing trouble inside and outside of the classroom. But the Maori students could identify that when working with Maori students the establishment of a positive relationship was one of the “most influential factors in their ability to achieve in the classroom” (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 254).

This relationship included high expectations and students feeling that teachers cared for them as learners. The students recognised that their teachers needed to be able to interact with Maori students (understand their culture) and knowing what needs to be taught. The teachers had to know how to lead their students to knowledge and manage the classroom with strategies that support Maori students to engage with learning as Maori. The Maori students also identified that they ‘acted out’ as a form of resistant behaviour. To assert their self-determination and described their absenteeism as a form of ‘voting with their feet’ and reacting to the dominant culture trying to assimilate them into the wider New Zealand culture (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 255).

The observations of the mainstream education system were not all negative. The Maori students did note positive educational experiences with some non-Maori teachers and noted that these experiences were beneficial. This beneficial relationship occurred when the professional educators could position themselves

within a Maori cultural framework. That is, "...where teachers work with Maori students in a proactive power-sharing way that promotes their aspirations for educational advancement as Maori, there will be rewarding outcomes for all concerned" (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 256). In developing an environment where students and educators can work within a mutually respectful, reciprocal relationship then all participants will gain some benefit from that relationship.

Whilst reviewing the literature where Indigenous students were interviewed about their standpoint on their education, some research was identified from North America interviewing Native American and First Nation students. Through the extensive literature search only two studies were found that involve asking Indigenous high school students their views on teachers, the educational system and the curriculum. Most of the research in relation to student voice with Native American and First Nation students was targeted at the transition from high school to college and their college experiences. These works pick up on some similar issues as I have identified in my analysis but my research is on compulsory school age students' not post-secondary education. Where college education is a choice students can make as adults with the choice of learning environments being different to mandatory school years. As school age students have a more directed curriculum and structure of mandatory outcomes, with learning being much more teacher directed than in the adult learning environment of higher education. There are some similarities with the views of Indigenous student voices but as I want to focus on compulsory age school students the work directed at this cohort is not an area this research will draw upon.

The first study I want to highlight is by Kanu (2002) from the University of Manitoba and her work with ten grade nine First Nation students in a social sciences class in an inner-city high school. Kanu developed an ethnographic study with two research conversations to delve into the students' views on teachers, their classroom strategies, the curriculum and the importance of elements of the students' Indigenous culture evident within these learning spaces. Kanu used research discussion as her methodological position to gain more complete understandings

from the student participants. Kanu followed Gadamer's work in using this method stating that,

"It is only during genuine conversation that the subject matter of the topic begins to emerge and take on recognizable meaning and adequate intelligibility. In this sense, conversation is not simply an incidental condition of inquiry, but...it is the very life of inquiry, discovery and truth itself" (Gadamer cited in Kanu, 2002, p. 104)

Kanu separated her findings into two major themes; firstly she grouped what teaching strategies, learning goals, tasks and curriculum materials that engaged Grade Nine Social Studies Indigenous students. The second focus group identified what Indigenous cultural socialisations enhanced First Nation students' participation and conceptual understandings. So Kanu highlighted practical aspects (teaching practices) and materials with the position of Indigenous cultural representation in engagement of First Nation students. Actions that Kanu presented for teachers to better engage with Indigenous students included the use of First Nation teaching practices including the use of story telling and observation and imitation. Highlighted the need for teachers to increase the use of visual learning and limit the high use of fast-paced talking as the major teaching expression but present their oral interactions as directed specific language to address the learning experience. Kanu stated that teachers should include supportive scaffolding into the structure of presentation of new topics with the use of many concrete-learning activities with some form of group orientated collaborative learning experiences.

With the presentation of Indigenous knowledge into the learning experiences to engage the students' culture into the learning environment and highlight that their culture has a presence in their classroom and with their teachers. This point was highlighted in various parts of the response responses reinforcing the cultural differences that the First nation students experience between themselves their teachers and their educational institutions. Elsie Wuttunee, the representative to Calgary Catholic Separate Schools District 1, commented on this in the Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 in relation to education and the assimilation of First Nation students on Reservation schools. Wuttunee stated that, “cultural conflict has been cited in several documents as a threat to the Aboriginal child's identity in the formal education system and a major cause of school failure” (Kanu, 2002, p. 117).

With a key element of the development of an effective teacher and student relationship based on respect where students feel welcomed in a warm, safe learning environment and have effective communication with their teachers where their culture and cultural knowledge is accepted within their classroom (Kanu, 2002, pp. 118-119).

Kanu highlighted the students’ view of the importance of their cultural knowledge being acknowledged and engaged with in their classrooms. This recognition of this should be developed in a reciprocal relationship where the teacher can bring some of these elements into the learning experiences or draw from the students knowledge systems to support the depth of understandings that can be brought into any learning experience. The issue of failing to engage the First Nation students identity was highlighted when some students stated, “the teachers generally did not talk about us as part of the lesson...Yeah, maybe they were scared to offend us” (Kanu, 2002, p. 114).

Kanu identified a view of cultural negligence on behalf of the teachers frequently in this study and as Ellis highlights the teachers should embed the students cultural identity instead to connect with the First Nation students. Ellis highlights that through the limited presentation of their cultural identity in the classroom, “minority students continue to be treated largely as invisible when they are made to experience textbooks and linguistic conventions considered to be neutral but that in fact assume a subject from the dominant white culture” (Kanu, 2002, p. 113).

Ellis extends these comments further from teachers’ lack of cultural consideration suggesting the First Nation students have limited intellectual cognition because they

are not engaging with these culturally foreign curriculum ideas. Ellis presents that, “without the knowledge or the interest to begin planning curriculum from an appreciation of who students are or what they know or care about, teachers tend to seek diagnostically and remediate what they think is missing in students” (Kanu, 2002, p. 114). This highlights the need for teachers to gain an understanding of their students’ cultural understandings and engage with these to draw the student into the learning space.

For Indigenous students and their communities this position of informing teachers and all students about their culture is an important part of their cultural responsibility to their land and country. This responsibility to country is important to Indigenous communities and something many Indigenous communities want to engage with in their child’s education. But if teachers’ are not embracing Indigenous relationships then the presentation of this knowledge of country may not be effectively presented in schools for the benefit of all students.

One other study in North America involving Native American student voices was developed by a small team of Native and non-Native researchers. This project was an extension from earlier work they had done with teachers and what they saw as best practice when working with Indigenous students. They found that limited work had been done in gathering the opinions of the Native American students themselves, Thomas Peacock, Linda Miller Cleary and Amy Bergstrom organised a phenomenological study on using Native American students to examine what they saw as the most appropriate way to engage them. The authors wanted a first hand view of the education system through using American Indian, First Nation, and Native Alaskan students to inform the research. As the authors stated, “the experience of the participant (Indigenous students) with regard to the subject being studied (their education) as important in coming to an understanding of that subject” (Peacock, Cleary, & Bergstrom, 2003, p. 391). So the specific view of the central participants (students) was the key link for any form of in-depth study of pedagogical practices for these educational researchers on these Native American students education.

This study involved a series of three individual interviews between the Indigenous students and a member of the research team. So a trusting relationship could develop over time with the research team members and allow for the participant to relate with his or her experience. Through repeat visits a relationship could develop to allow for students to reflect on the experience, and to some extent, make greater sense of it. This process allowed the research team to review interviews and develop some focal points to target their questioning in later interviews and investigate with deeper intent.

The research included open-ended interviews of 120 American Indian, First Nation, and Native Alaskan high school students across a large variety of school environments. These included students living in reserve or reservation villages and urban communities. The students attended diverse educational facilities including private, tribal and public schools. The researchers identified the schools right across North America including the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and Northwest parts of the United States and in West, Mid-West, and Eastern Canada. This was to allow for a diverse range of understandings. The school administration of each school after accepting their invitation to participate in the study selected students who fit the criteria of the study. So Indigenous students were selected who fit one of the following categories of either doing very well, doing okay or struggling in school and groups were organised with equal sample numbers. Students only participated if they were willing and if they had signed consent.

The key focus of this study was to ask Indigenous students' their perceptions of how schools, teachers, curricula, and Native Americans' circumstances assisted or hindered their success. Students were asked to target effective teaching and teacher-student interactions and make any suggestions about conditions that could create success. From the analysis of these interviews the authors grouped their discussion into two main themes, those being (1) teaching characteristics and (2) personal characteristics that relate to good teaching practices for Indigenous students. This broad categorisation was developed from the authors analysis over

time from the series of interviews with the Indigenous students on effective teaching practice with Native students.

The teaching characteristics included teachers having an understanding and being able to engage Native American cultural knowledge into their classroom practices, and providing clear explanations of concepts with the use of examples that the students can relate to. They would like the teachers who had high expectations of the students, be encouraging of the Indigenous students and demand the respect of the learners. They should treat the students fairly, be flexible and helpful in their approaches and be interested in the student and be able to listen to what the student is saying. As the authors stated about connecting with Native students is “What makes average teachers good and turns good teachers into great teachers is that great teachers connect with students more effectively and often” (Peacock et al., 2003, p. 289).

The personal characteristics that were identified by the authors include the positive relationship behaviours of the teacher such as being caring, friendly, fun, open-minded and mellow. With the teacher to be able to show patience and respect for the students and that the teacher needs to show that they will stay at the school for more than the obligatory one or two year term before moving onto better school environments’ (Peacock, 2006, p. 11). Various Native American students highlighted this feature during the interview process and the authors informed us of this when they stated,

“These young people are Native 24/7, and being Native can be a rugged experience. They need teachers who won’t ditch out on them at the drop of a hat, so the teachers who stick with it will get these students’ respect” (Peacock et al., 2003, p. 306).

With all of these understandings the teacher should be able to use multiple approaches when trying to present a new concept to students to engage with the variety of learning preferences that are present in any given classroom.

In the analysis of the positive pedagogical characteristics a heavy overlap of behavioural practices were acknowledged. The authors state that these two organised categories should be left as two separate groups of behaviours by teachers and the authors suggest that there is not a single answer to teaching Native American students. But teachers should understand that these are practices that the students believe all teachers must engage with when working with Native students and be able to adapt and interchange these characteristic to suit the needs of the individual Native students that the teacher is working with. What Peacock, Bergstrom and Miller-Cleary presented is very similar pedagogical approaches to what the other educational researchers of other Indigenous student voice studies have argued.

In an Australian context there has been very limited work on asking Aboriginal students about their education. More than two decades ago, Dr Basia Gutman-Black asked some urban Aboriginal students about their views of schools, teachers and what they found valuable in their schooling experience (Gutman-Black, 1992). This work was identified primarily to support teachers in interpreting Aboriginal students behaviour in school, classroom management and how to communicate more effectively with Aboriginal students. This work was aimed to inform teachers about urban Aboriginal primary school students' behaviour and likes about school, not about improving pedagogical practices when working with Aboriginal students.

A notable study was conducted in 2001 by a research team lead by Godfrey from Edith Cowan University (ECU) where the research team administered surveys to 470 Aboriginal students across Middle School (Year 5 to Year 10) attempting to analyse the treatment and care they receive at school (Godfrey, Partington, Richer, & Harslett, 2001). This work had a focus on Indigenous students' views of school environments and the systemic management of Indigenous students, with some targeted questioning towards views of teachers. This work has some minor similarities with the research that I am producing about students' voices on pedagogical practices but the tools of measurement are very different.

The use of structured surveys using a Likert scale compared to a narrative analysis of collaborative storying is the main feature of this analytical difference. The rigidity of the quantitative measures of a survey in the Godfrey study had less flexibility to allow for the open-ended discussion that a Yarning Circle or a narrative methodology would allow. The rigidity of a quantitative survey is established due to the interpretation and meaning of the items are fixed by the theoretical choices made before its participants give their responses. The use of a structured survey and quantitative measures may not allow for the inclusivity that Indigenous narrative would present. That is to allow students to express their view from their standpoint using language that has meaning to that student and their peers. One risk is that the structured questions established in the Godfrey work by non-Indigenous academics would force the Indigenous students to step out of their cultural boundaries to interpret the questions. What I mean by cultural boundaries is that the Indigenous students would have to code shift to analysis the questions from a non-Indigenous position. Consider their response from an Indigenous position match it up to the available criteria in a non-Indigenous context before they were able to complete the task through ticking a box. Eisner (cited in Bishop, 1997) supports this interpretation of quantitative rigidity by stating,

"Qualitative inquiry is concerned with sets of principles, arrays of heuristics, critical reflections and expressions that allow complexity and diversity to be acknowledged and examined, rather than quantitative inquiry concerns about establishing a procedure, a formula or a set of rules" (Bishop, 1997, p. 30).

Godfrey's use of a quantitative research method in a survey had limited some of the freedom that more qualitative methods would have allowed to these students when expressing themselves in their responses. The use of a quantitative method gave a 'result' more than expressing a complete truth. As Bishop stresses, "In qualitative inquiry, the researcher does not follow a set of 'how-to's', but rather paints a picture, potentially facilitating the voice of the research participant to be heard, for others to reflect on" (Bishop, 1997, p. 30). The use of student voice and collaborative storying will allow for a clear, open voice from Indigenous students'. Making a mark on a

Likert scale takes away from students the power to fully vocalise their views. They are responding in other people's words rather than their own, reducing the potency of their responses.

My study was more aligned to the Bishop methodological approach of 'collaborative storytelling' and about allowing the narratives of the Indigenous students to inform the work about the main influences of their educational achievement and engagement in the context of the teachers, curriculum and schools. The 'collaborative storytelling' is a narrative between the Indigenous students and the Indigenous researcher, through the use of a Yarning Circle structure of open discussion around issues relating to the study rather than a question/ response structure to the interviews.

Yarning Circles are a level space where all participants are equally valued in the discussion. The Yarning Circle involves all the participants sitting in a circle facing each other that allows for all participants to see each other comfortably in an open discussion space. Through using a circle structure establishes a safe non-hierarchical place where everyone present has the opportunity to speak without interruptions. For many Indigenous peoples this circular structure is the norm for community gatherings especially at important community meetings where the community gains guidance from the leaders (Elders) who bring their wisdom to the issue in open discussion to inform the community or suggest direction when developing viewpoints. This style of discourse is a known structure to Indigenous peoples, a comfortable space and a forum typically seen as a culturally secure space for open collaborative discussion. This use of a yarning methodology has been found to be an effective tool when working with Indigenous participants, allowing a free flowing investigative discussion within a culturally appropriate setting (Blair, 2008; Hanlen, 2002). The design and use of a Yarning Circle structure will be further discussed later in this chapter.

A recent study was published in May 2015 that has some similarities to my research in targeting Indigenous students voices about their education but the Indigenous community participants were also interviewed and influenced the study results.

Indigenous parents, Indigenous teachers and Indigenous students were interviewed from the Townsville Catholic Education Diocese about their standpoint on education for the students. These interviews are Stage 1 of a three-stage project to develop an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) for working with Indigenous students (Lewthwaite et al., 2015).

Stage 1 interviews were carried out to discover what Indigenous students, their parents and some Indigenous teachers identified as the best teaching practices to engage Indigenous students. This study interviewed Grade 9 to 12 Indigenous students as individuals (27 students) and some groups (16 students) from four of the Diocese schools. They also interviewed 27 Indigenous parents as individual and in groups from five Diocese schools including some Indigenous teachers from these schools.

These interviews were informal collaborative discussions with questions designed around formal and informal educational experiences. Trying to investigate what the best teaching practices and settings came from these experiences. The participants' were asked what they would change about their teachers and what good characteristics belonged to good teachers and finally they were asked to hypothesize what a new teacher would need to know when teaching them.

The authors noted two different types of responses from the Indigenous parents and the students' discussions. The parents' responses comments were on systemic issues in education similar to the literature, where the student comments targeted tangible expressions' of teacher practice they felt engaged them. This difference was one specific reason why in my research I chose to speak only with Indigenous students. As an Indigenous teacher and parent I carry some similar understandings to the responses made by the Indigenous community group and through my research I have a clear understanding of the current literature. But Indigenous students today are working in a 21st century environments that are different from my educational experiences as a student. The students will see educational practices from their contemporary standpoint as students that may be different to that of an

education professional examining educational systems. As Lewthwaite noted there is a need to ask Indigenous students their standpoint not that of a teacher or parent on how they see educational practices (Lewthwaite et al., 2015, p. 134).

The Indigenous parents statements identified the need for system wide recognition of Indigenous histories and Indigenous identity as part of the Australian identity. They also highlighted the difference the system establishes by not changing to recognise these issues and depend on the students to make the code shifts to adapt between school and their home lives. The Indigenous students commented upon various pedagogical practices such as the significance of relationship between students and teachers. Working with ACK to engage and inform students, the use of effective language to clearly connect and explain content with students and to maintain a variety of learning practices to engage Indigenous students to the learning experience.

The authors have identified that this research has established some empirical data in the development of some form of ETP to engage Indigenous students to their education. Many of the features identified in this work have similar responses to my Yarning Circle discussions. With my research expressing some similar findings from a different approach and extending some of this works understandings. Going from a broad generalist comment to some more explicit examination of why the Indigenous student connected with specific educational practices. Some of these extended understandings involve the use of interactive teaching with Indigenous students and the need for some systematic institutional changes. These include engaging with Indigenous education workers at schools and organising Indigenous spaces or rooms to support students and community at the school.

Through asking students about their standpoint on their education is one way to gain an insight from the target audience. As it has been highlighted in this body of research gaining an understanding about how Indigenous compulsory school age students feel is very limited. But there have been some similarities expressed by Indigenous students through the small number of research tasks that have been

completed. These similarities include the relationships developed between the teacher and the Indigenous student, the recognition of their Indigeneity and the engagement of their culture within their educational spaces.

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