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What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in North Queensland Say about Effective Teaching Practices: Measuring Cultural Competence

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Abstract: *This paper summarizes the findings from the first and second phase of a three part Australian Research Council funded project conducted by James Cook University in partnership with the Diocese of Catholic Education, Townsville, Queensland. Overall the project investigates what Aboriginal¹ students perceive as the qualities of effective teachers and the impact these identified qualities have on educational outcomes. As part of the research we sought to empirically validate the generalisability of commonly cited characteristics of effective teaching by Aboriginal students. In the first phase we gathered accounts of effective teaching practice from students, parents and their teachers from phenomenologically aligned interviews. Similar and contrasting themes from these three groups are presented, for the purpose of exposing potential mismatch between teacher, student and parent views of 'effective' teaching practice. This phase led to the development of a qualitatively informed Effective Teaching Profile for Aboriginal students. The second phase involved quantitative analyses using Latent Trait Theory to refine and validate the constructed instrument to be used to measure teachers' cultural competence. As a result of the validation processes the variability of teachers' cultural pedagogical competence across schools was exposed. Finally, the forthcoming third phase of the study which will investigate the impact of these identified qualities on educational outcomes is described.*

Introduction

The current national discourse in education in Australia shows contest amongst a variety of stakeholders for methods by which the discrepancy between Indigenous (both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) and non-Indigenous learning outcomes can be addressed by improving teaching, few of which give consideration to the significance of students' cultural backgrounds as a determinant for influencing mainstream educational success (Sarra, 2011). Evident within this contest, especially in North Queensland where this study is situated, are divergent voices for informing change in teaching practice that can assist in improving educational outcomes for students in general and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students specifically (Archer and Hughes, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Nakata, 1999; Rowe, 2006; Sarra, 2011; Yunkaporta, 2010). Amongst this discourse is the call for teaching practice that demonstrates links between

school and the everyday realities of Indigenous peoples' life practices, histories and cultures (Sarra, 2011). If ignored and, consequently, by treating all students, however much they differ, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system gives its sanction to the initial (and historical) inequality in relation to culture (Bourdieu, 1990). As asserted by Lingard & Keddie (2013), a 'pedagogy of indifference' will continue to prevent marginalised students in Australia from accessing the cultural capital that is rewarded within mainstream education.

Despite the often quoted characteristics of a 'pedagogy of difference' and the plethora of untested 'good ideas' cited in the Australian literature (Lloyd, Lewthwaite and Boon, 2015), no systematic and empirically-based research provides any conclusive indication of 'what works' in influencing Indigenous students' learning. Similar to Castagno and Brayboy's (2008) international challenge, Perso (2012) calls for [state and Commonwealth] governments to support empirically-based research to verify the culturally located practices identified as likely or possible contributors to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' achievement. As Rowe (2006, p.22) laments, "there is a growing uneasiness [in Australian education] related to how little is known about teacher quality from Indigenous students' own perspectives". As Craven et al. assert (2007, p. 4) "there is astoundingly little known about what Aboriginal students see as the qualities of effective teachers and the impact this has on educational outcomes." As well, Craven et al. state, "There is a need to critically validate the generalisability of effective teaching practice findings to Aboriginal students to tease out facets of quality teaching that are salient to Aboriginal students; elucidate their perspectives of teacher quality; and test the influence of specific facets of quality teaching on academic outcomes and the consequences of the findings for developing interventions for Aboriginal school students" (2007, p. 4).

The research described here focuses on addressing this imperative. In this paper, we present the outcomes of the first and second phases of a three phase research initiative which arises to support a move towards a better understanding of teaching quality from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait student and parent perspective; that is, to determine the teaching and teacher classroom practices that have value in learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In the first phase of the research we ask: What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students their parents and teacher identify as the teaching practices that influence their learning? How do the views of these three stakeholders correspond? From these data we end Phase One by presenting an Effective Teaching Profile for Aboriginal students. In the second phase of this research, we describe the processes used to develop an instrument that measures teachers' pedagogical cultural competence and investigate its variability statistically across schools.

Background to the Study: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is defined as using students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for students (Gay, 2000). By so doing, teachers support students' by adjusting classroom practices to reduce discontinuity between students' lived experience and classrooms (Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Lewthwaite, Owen, Dixon, Doiron, Renaud & McMillan, 2014, Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010b; Lewthwaite & Renaud, 2009).

Correspondingly, a Culturally Responsive Teacher (CRT) understands that students come to school with a whole set of practices, beliefs, skills, and understandings formed from their experience in their world. The responsive teacher's role is not to ignore or replace these understandings and skills, but to recognize the teaching practices and understandings and affirm these in formal classroom settings (Lewthwaite et al., 2014; 2015).

CRP is often associated with a deeper imbued perspective – critical pedagogy (Lewthwaite et al., 2014). Critical pedagogy is defined as an educational movement consciously designed to help recognize authoritarian tendencies in educational settings and, subsequently, use this knowledge as a foundation for taking constructive action (Giroux, 2010), often with emancipatory considerations (Sarra, 2011). Accordingly, a CRT will hold a critical awareness of the injustice of existing social orders, including education, which have historically and, arguably, continue to disenfranchise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from learning experiences due to the practices of schools and classrooms that are symptomatically incongruent with their cultural norms (Nakata, 1999). A CRT re-examines and, ultimately, assists in the reconstruction of practices in order to work towards a social order based upon a reconceptualization of what can and should be achieved for disenfranchised students.

The Research Focus

The research described here focuses on addressing this imperative. In this paper, we present the outcomes of the first and second phases of a three phase research initiative whose aims are to provide a better understanding of teaching quality from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait student and parent perspective; that is, to determine the teaching and teacher classroom practices that promote learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. As stated, the first phase focused on understanding the degree of correspondence amongst Aboriginal parents', students' and teachers' views of responsive pedagogy. Based upon this commentary, an Effective Teaching Profile was developed. In the second phase of the research, this profile was developed into an instrument that was statistically validated and used to measure teacher cultural competence across a wide spectrum of North Queensland schools.

Methodology

Phase One: The first phase of the study employed a variety of data sources to improve the confirmability and transferability in the findings. These sources consisted of student data from individual interviews with (a) 27 grade 9-12 students, all self-identifying as Aboriginal, in four schools, (b) group interviews with 16 Grade 9-12 students from four schools, (c) individual and group interviews with 27 parents and caregivers from all five schools, and (d) individual interviews with 26 teachers from the schools the students attended. The median age of teachers was 26, with a median of four years of teaching experience, most of which was confined to their current school or schools in urban centres where one might expect there would be a small proportion of Indigenous students. It is noteworthy that the schools' Indigenous student roll ranged from 14% to 100%. It is not the intent of the first phase to draw interschool comparisons, primarily because the data gave little indication that this roll difference reflected in the commentary provided by any stakeholder group. Interviews were conducted by the first author, often with the assistance of the third author. In all cases and in line with empirical existential phenomenology (Crotty, 1998), we asked open questions that provided opportunity for students, parents and caregivers to reflect on, without interruption or prompting, prior formal (school-based) and informal (family or community-based) learning experiences. In the semi-structured interviews, we asked students and parents questions about (a) what was happening when they (or their child) were learning best both in informal and informal settings, (b) what they would change about their teachers' teaching to assist them (or their child) in their learning, (c) teachers of good consequence and the characteristics of these teachers, both in informal and formal contexts and (d) if they (or their child) was to get a new teacher, what would they want the teacher to know about them (or their child) and their learning? Teachers were asked similar questions: (a) what informs their teaching of Aboriginal students; (b) what is

happening when Aboriginal students are learning in informal and informal settings; (c) teachers of good consequence and the characteristics of these teachers, both in informal and formal contexts; and (d) what information would they provide to a new colleague about effectively teaching Aboriginal students. We left it open to the student, parent or teacher to decide to which of these statements to respond. In all cases, the interviews were 'a chat' - non-jargoned and open, and delivered in a slow-paced and deliberate manner - based upon the need for collaboration between researchers and participants to construct the final story capturing the fundamental essence of participants' experiences (Bevan-Brown, 1998; Bishop, 2003; Van Manen, 2007).

All conversations were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The data collected, once analysed by the research team (that is, all authors), were shared with the Catholic Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee and with the teaching and administration staff of the five Catholic Education schools in which the study was located. Thematic analysis was conducted by the researchers individually and then collectively. The first step in the thematic analysis process involved open coding, which involved reading each of the transcripts to identify and code significant quotes. Coding allowed the researchers to individually and collectively review the whole of the data by identifying the breadth of comment from each stakeholder group and their most significant meaning as pertaining to their characterization of effective teaching. The preliminary analysis of the interview data from this stage, integrated with the literature, was used to inform the accounts to be presented in the first part of the Results section. Following this, we sought to investigate the correspondence amongst these three groups. This correspondence (or lack of) is presented in the first part of the Results section.

Based upon the themes identified through the conversations with students, their parents and teachers, we developed an Effective Teaching Profile. This profile phase focused on moving the study from a qualitative to quantitative orientation. A team of three professionals in education identified seven categories and generated 83 items for the initial pool of items to be used in a CRP instrument gathered from the first qualitative phase. Specifically, the category characteristics identified in the qualitative phase were broken down to survey items by the research team with the help of a senior school teacher and administrator responsible for curriculum development and delivery for appropriate pedagogy for Indigenous students in Catholic Education and an Indigenous teacher. This was deemed important in order to ensure that the wording of the items was unambiguous and the intended meaning of the items was retained. Further, the items were at that stage grouped into distinct clusters thought to inform responsive pedagogy and reflective of those categories identified by the parents, community members and students. The categories that were identified by Indigenous parents, students and teachers for the purpose of the survey instrument were: Pedagogical expertise, Literacy

teaching, Explicitness, Ethic of care, Self-regulation support, Behaviour support and Indigenous Cultural Value. The items that were included in the survey were constructed in such a way as to honour the views of the Indigenous parents, community members and students interviewed and to represent important aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as informed by the literature. We stated these characteristics as questions as a prompt for reflection, taking into consideration many readers of this paper are likely practicing teachers or pre-service teachers. All characteristics were consistently mentioned by students, parents and teachers as attributes of teachers of consequence and, we have found, consistently identified as practices influencing students' learning in ongoing research in northern Canadian settings (Lewthwaite et al 2007, 2010), Aotearoa-New Zealand and prior research in the Torres Strait context (Osborne, 1993, 1996, 2001). What we also wish to make note of is how community members identified that these characteristics of effective teachers are currently *commonly* being experienced in the Catholic Education Diocese, suggesting to us that the attribute of care claimed in the mandate of Catholic Education is being realised in current practice.

Phase Two: The constructed CRP instrument was then piloted with a group of 141 Catholic Education teachers for refinement. The final sample consisted of 80 elementary and 61 secondary school teachers. The survey was made available to teachers teaching in Catholic education schools in parts of North Queensland on-line via Survey Monkey. No demographic information was sought other than whether the teacher was a secondary or elementary teacher. Specific instructions for answering the survey questions were printed above the first question referring to pedagogy, explaining the response format, namely that: *"The statements in this questionnaire deal with the actions or behaviours that might be seen or used in the classroom. Answer the questions based upon the degree you believe these actions or behaviours are used in your classroom. There are 5 possible answers for each behaviour ranging from "almost never" to "almost always". Please be honest and accurate in your answer."* The items required teachers to respond in a Likert scale format with the response format being:

- Almost never <20% of the time
- Once in a while: 20-39% of the time
- Sometimes: 40-59% of the time
- Frequently: 60-79% of the time
- Almost always \geq 80% of the time

The instrument for culturally responsive pedagogy was validated via Rasch analysis (Boon & Lewthwaite 2015).

Results

Phase One Qualitative Results

Because the purpose of the first phase of the research was to identify (1) what the three groups of participants identified as enhancers of student learning and characteristics of effective teachers and (2) the degree of similarity amongst these three groups, we have organized the themes from our data around these two headings. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide detailed comments that pertain to each theme. These more detailed accounts are provided in two further publications (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015; Lewthwaite et al, 2015). These publications draw attention to how the commentary compares to that identified through the literature review conducted by the authors (Lloyd et al., 2015).

Participant Views of Effective Teachers: Parents' Comments

We found distinct differences in the content of the responses from parents as compared to students and teachers. The comments from parents and carers almost exclusively pertained to systemic issues in education commonly identified in the Australian literature (for example, Frigo et al., 2004), whereas responses from students and teachers tended to be associated with tangible expressions of such issues in teachers' practice, albeit that students' comments were much more specific and diverse than teachers. Five themes arose from the parental comments. These comprised:

Understanding Our History with Education

At the forefront of parents' responses was their socially constructed experience with mainstream education. Parents expressed a desire for change, but realized that their history with education, collectively and individually, was negative, not forgotten and influenced how they interpreted and responded to their current experiences, especially through the experiences of their children (Lewthwaite et al., 2015).

Understanding the 'Code-Switching' Required of Our Children

Parents understood the nuance of schools and what was privileged for influencing success in schools (Delpit, 1995; Rowe, 2006) academically and socially. Student's home culture was often seen to be incommensurable and discontinuous with school culture and academic success. Several parents understood this disconnect and actively sought to inform and equip their children in meeting this disconnect with attention to code-switching - a conscious adjustment to the social norms of schools.

Understanding Our Perceived Inability to Change Schooling as It Exists Today

Parents' comments indicated that they had little influence on the way schools operated, especially what was perceived as an unquestioned operation that catered to the aspirations and patterns of the dominant society only and, as they perceived, made little allowance for difference.

Wanting Teachers and Schools to Hold an Alternative Point of View of Indigenous Students and the Communities They Represent

Apparent in the comments from parents was their hope for their children's education and for teachers' positive perceptions of their children. In most conversations, participants perceived, through their own experience as learners or second-hand through their children's experience, that they had been viewed with deficit by teachers as 'lesser' or 'not as capable as' [non-Indigenous learners] (Kerwin, 2011). These beliefs, in turn, influenced how teachers interacted with students and parents (Trouw, 1997) with parents and students being given less attention in interactions at the community and classroom respectively.

Wanting Schooling and Teaching to Affirm Cultural Identity and Have a More Holistic Focus, Not Just on Academic Achievement

Participants asserted that they wanted the formal curriculum to be the vehicle for the development of personal attributes they deemed as important, especially students' self-beliefs about themselves as learners and culturally located individuals (Sarra, 2011). Parents frequently mentioned that teachers' attention was primarily focused on academic achievement with little attention given to the development of the whole child as a culturally located individual.

In summary, participants provided direct evidence regarding the impacts their parents and/or they themselves had experienced historically in schools. Parents' claims give unquestionable evidence of Freire's notion of conscientisation (1970), drawing attention to the problematic nature of treating all students the same and, when attention was given to Indigenous students, this attention being grounded in a deficit perspective. Overall, parents believed that because the educational system paid limited attention to interrupting ingrained teaching practice, it continued to sanction the perpetuation of long-standing inequality in relation to culture (Bourdieu, 1990).

Participant Views of Effective Teachers: Students Comments

Students' commentaries pertained to specific teacher actions that they deemed to be supportive of their learning at the classroom level, either indirectly or directly. No mention was made of the systemic issues in education commonly identified by their parents.

Developing Positive Relationships are Crucial as a Foundation for Learning

In contrast to parents' conscious awareness of historical inequity, was students' attention to their everyday school and classroom experiences. Students' commentaries largely reiterated a tangible outworking of parental comments, especially in reference to the importance of relationship as the determinant precursor to constructive student-teacher relationships and learning (Hudsmith, 1992).

Cultural Bridges Are Used to Promote Learning

Several students made comments pertaining to tangible evidence of local community and the resources of the community as positive influences, both directly and indirectly on their engagement with school and learning. Students commonly made mention of local community members that contributed to their learning, typically through learning activities outside of formal classroom learning (Milgate and Giles-Browne, 2013).

Students Are Supported in Negotiating the Literacy Demands of School

Students' comments, in contrast to parents, commonly focused on teacher pedagogy, which were then subdivided into several categories. First, students identified a variety of ways in which they were supported in literacy learning, often within the context of other learning areas, especially mathematics. Teacher attention to the literacy demands and methods to support this was seen as a major characteristic of effective teachers, who recognise that English is often the second or third language of Indigenous students (Clarke, 1997).

Learning Intentions Are Made Clear Through a Dialogic Environment

Pedagogical comments also included the communication patterns of classrooms. The language patterns of classrooms were perceived to strongly influence student engagement and learning. Without attention to communication patterns, the spoken word became a barrier for learning. Making clear the intended learning was very important to students (Yunkaporta, 2010). Clarity of speech and learning intent were seen as crucial for learning. The communication patterns were encouraged to be dialogical rather than univocal, voluntary rather than involuntary and under-spoken rather than over-spoken (Malcolm et al, 1999).

Teaching is Differentiated to Accommodate Student Diversity

Further pedagogical commentary from students focused on how effective teachers accommodated rather than assimilated students in classrooms, especially in the teaching and learning process. In their comments was evidence of classrooms operating under guiding principles rather than imposed and restrictive rules. Students emphasised the importance of high expectations being encouraged for classroom behaviour and student performance, especially in operative terms that allowed everyone to engage in learning. Especially important was an organisational structure at the classroom level that provided time, opportunity and support for students to learn and show learning (Nichol & Robinson, 2000). Also, working that allowed for assistance and feedback from peers, that is, a classroom grounded on learning reciprocally (McRae et al, 2000).

A Variety of Practices for Promoting Learning

The mention of being 'talked to', or 'copying notes', or being 'alone' in learning and 'listening to learn' were the most common negative references made by student participants suggesting that hierarchical and univocal classrooms, although perceived as well-managed, were not perceived as favourable environments for learning. In all, students identified over 20 teacher practices that contributed to their learning, most of which are commonly cited in the effective teaching literature (Hattie, 2009). In good teaching practice, respondents mentioned that the learning intentions were made clear with modelling and demonstrations. Visual images and modalities other than text were commonly used (Yunkaporta, 2010). Repetition and a focus on mastery were emphasized (Sullivan & van Riel, 2013). Time was provided to process learning and gain mastery. Learning was assessed in a variety of ways, not just in written form (Klenowski, 2009). Learners were given personal and timely feedback to support next steps in learning. Collaboration and reciprocation amongst students and teacher in learning was seen as important. Students commented that receiving individual attention, feedback and affirmation as they learned was vital (Pegg and Graham, 2013). Story-telling and the use of narratives focusing on authentic subjects were significant in promoting engagement and learning (Yunkaporta, 2010). Learning was not abstract; but meaningfully connected to students' lives and prior learning and situated in the local context (Frigo et al., 2004). It focused on knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Learning was enriched through 'working to end' type projects that promoted independence and collaboration, creativity, perseverance, and self-evaluation of progress towards tangible end products (Callingham and Griffin 2002). Literacy and numeracy development were emphasized explicitly in the learning (Rose, Gray & Cowey, 1999). Developing fluency in these areas was seen as a priority for students who recognised the capital which rewarded success in schools (Pegg & Graham, 2013). In all, students identified a range of influences on their learning. Importantly, they identified that very few of their teachers exhibited this range of practice.

Mechanisms are put in Place to Support and Monitor Student Behaviour

Finally, and likely most significantly, students most commonly mentioned the importance of demonstrative relationships and expectations being the cornerstones for positive student-teacher interactions and classroom environments (Harslett, Godfrey, Harrison, Partington & Richer, 1999). Students openly talked about their more common experience with 'non-learning' environments where teachers were reactive to student off task behaviours with little awareness of the importance of establishing positive relationships as the pro-active foundation for constructive learning environments for the development of individuals - socially, intellectually and culturally (Hudsmith, 1992).

In all, students' comments emphasised tangible, observable practices in the classroom, rather than the more abstract, systemic aspects identified by parents. Students' comments reiterated many findings of Hattie (2009) and Archer and Hughes (2011), especially in regards to explicit attention to learning goals, provision of feedback and variety of practices to support learning. In addition, students also repeatedly endorsed teacher attributes that showed teacher sensitivity to students' cultural backgrounds and, especially, language competencies.

Participant Views of Effective Teachers: Teachers' Comments

The analysis of teachers' commentaries provided evidence of nine themes representative of effective teaching practice. These are briefly described below.

Essential Classroom Skills

Teachers' comments consistently drew attention to the need for well-developed and diverse teaching skills to serve the diverse needs of Indigenous students. Apparent within teachers' comments was that Indigenous students demanded teachers' best practice, in all regards. Teachers were unequivocal in wanting to provide their best practice in response to this demand. Although several of the comments made by teachers reflected students' requests (for example, attention to proactive rather than reactive behaviour management strategies), students' requests were more varied and detailed and identified aspects of practice likely to be less obvious for teachers (for example, succinct communication patterns) (Hudspith, 1997).

Individual Accommodations

Foremost in teachers' commentary was the requirement and capability to differentiate instruction to address the variability in students' capabilities, especially in responding to the areas of literacy and behavioural attributes of students. Allowing for individual student mastery of concepts through adjusted pace and resource use were commonly identified practices important for Aboriginal students (Sullivan & van Riel, 2013).

Students' Holistic Needs

Teachers communicated a commitment to serving Indigenous students developmentally through attention to students broad learning needs, not just academically, but also socially, spiritually and, on occasion, culturally. The ethos of Catholic Education explicitly attends to holistic learning for all students, and teachers' comments showed that this assertion was not mere rhetoric since they often mentioned the need to attend to the multiple dimensions of students' development. Nonetheless, there was little evidence in teachers' commentaries that attention to students' cultural identities was necessary (Christie, 1995).

Affective Relationships

Reference was commonly made to the importance of teachers developing positive relationships with Indigenous students. Teachers drew attention to how Indigenous students were “cautious learners” or “not confident learners” and affirming students, especially in their learning, was an integral element of their teaching focus. “Welcoming” students and “being there” were seen as critical components of building positive affective relationships with students that in turn promoted the conditions necessary for engagement and learning (Dockett, Mason & Perry, 2006).

Code Switching

Teachers repeatedly spoke of the adjustment Indigenous students had to make in negotiating the demands of schools, especially in reference to English language. Reference to these norms was evident in terms such as “familiar with English language” or the “conventions of classrooms” (Berry & Hudson, 1997).

Explicit Teaching

In response to the difficulty students often experienced in adjusting to the normative expectations of classrooms, teachers commonly made mention of the importance of explicit teaching, especially in drawing students’ attention to the learning goals of individual lessons and providing, through demonstration, detailed focus to the learning process. Teachers frequently described a learning process corresponding to a gradual release of responsibility model that still made provision for scaffolded inquiry (Archer & Hughes, 2011, Fisher & Frey, 2008).

Supportive Environment

All teachers emphasized that creating a classroom environment that worked to support all students in their learning was of particular importance for Indigenous students. Reciprocal learning, drawing from students individual strengths to assist others in their learning, was identified as a priority in classroom function (McRae et al., 2000).

Relevant Learning

Teachers drew attention to the importance of making learning relevant. Reference to “concrete” rather than “abstract” learning activities was common. “Concrete” activities usually were associated with “hands-on” activities. Awareness that these “concrete” experiences should be culturally located was not demonstrated. Teaching practices that drew attention to use of narrative, metaphor or visual reference were also absent from teachers’ comments (Yunkaporta, 2010).

Cognitive Learning Practices

Teachers commonly made mention of cognitive teaching practices; that is,

practices that they perceived assisted in learning by drawing upon their understanding of cognitive function and strategies that aligned with such function, for example avoiding cognitive overload by scaffolding and chunking material, spaced repetition of rote learning and multiple representations of concepts.

In all, teachers like students, referred to tangible, observable practices in the classroom, rather than the more abstract, systemic aspects identified by parents. Despite this similarity, teachers' comments did not show the same degree of awareness of the critical importance of students' requested emphasis on assistance in navigating the literacy demands of classrooms, the necessity for explicitness and support in instruction and attention to students' cultural background.

To illustrate the commentary from each stakeholder group, we provide one example for each that demonstrates the dominant themes expressed.

It is important to know and understand our history with education. It's a history I do not think many teachers know. It might be a part of the past, but knowing helps to build a better future for our children. It is an important history as it helps to understand how many parents and their children approach education today. For many, including my parents it was not positive. School was not a welcoming place. You weren't made to feel welcome so for every [Aboriginal] person there is that reservation - a mistrust with schools, and with teachers. It's just too much a part of our history. So, when our children go to school I think they carry that same sensitivity to school and to teachers. They can sense it and until they are really sure and certain, there will be that mistrust in the background. Until they see something different there will be that mistrust. It is taking a long time to change. There was a time I felt schools were changing to be more aware of what was important to us. That is the bad part [of the past]. It never has worked for us. Sometimes there will be a bit of a change but not much. [Schooling] is still not something we have say in. [Parent]

The math[ematics]s problems are just not in words. He'll show you and you have to work it through. I mean, you can see the problem. Not just read it from a piece of paper. Then you will work it through right there, figuring it out and you're doing the maths but not really aware that you are. When it's in a book, you just get lost....because the words don't tell you what you are supposed to do. Then when you have it, the words come. But they have to after the real thing. Just so the words make sense. Before reading, she goes over the hard words and maybe has pictures that get you thinking [not just words]. Really slow. It helps to know what will be in [the reading] and what it means. It's

like she knows what words will give you trouble. She doesn't make you feel stupid, just really supportive. When you are on your own [reading], I can't understand because it's just words. You maybe can read those words but not know [and comprehend]. That's why what she does really helps. [Student]

I don't want to generalize, but, in general, they are quieter and less willing to put forward their answers or ideas or volunteer [in the classroom]. I give them space, time to think through and follow them to develop that confidence. That confidence is the key and knowing that you believe in them. Then when that trust is there, that's the key. I am careful in my actions. I'll try to spend time alongside them. But, if it's something they have that confidence in, then watch out. They thrive. I really try hard to make their assets to be the foundation for developing and extending their confidence. Once that relationship of trust is there, that's the difference maker. [Teacher]

Similarities Amongst The Three Participant Groups

Figure 1 illustrates the themes identified within the commentaries of each participant group. Further, it illustrates the degree of overlap amongst these groups. We only include categories in the overlap sections that were evident across the majority of the commentaries; that is, we eliminate themes that may have been evidenced in isolated cases. For example, although accommodation of individual differences was referred to by some teachers, this view was not expressed by the majority of teachers.

We draw attention to points of congruence and incongruence evident in Figure 1. First, we note the incongruence between teachers and parents in relation to knowledge of Indigenous peoples' histories and understanding of how this history manifests in schools, especially through the tenuous nature of teacher-parent and teacher-student interactions. At the forefront of parents' responses was their socially constructed experience with mainstream education. Parents expressed a desire for change, but realized that history is negative, not forgotten and influenced how they interpreted and responded to their current experiences, especially through the experiences of their children. The historical ramifications of the influence of the consequence of colonial history as expressed by these parents has strong resonance with findings from ethnographies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Dunn, 2001; Nakata 1999). Parents perceived that this history continues to be unchallenged and unchanged and thus perpetuates the inequity in education and parents' conscious response, usually negatively, to educational matters, locally and nationally today (Kerwin, 2011). Effective teaching had to acknowledge this history and was identified as an integral initial step for altered change in practice.

Second, we draw attention to the focus made by all participant groups on ‘code-switching’. Parents and students understood the nuance of schools and what was privileged for leading to success in schools (Delpit, 1995; Rowe, 2006) both academically and socially. Lewthwaite et al., (2014; 2015) assert that the ‘matter of schools’ and means by which Indigenous students succeed in mainstream schooling is largely grounded in students’ proficiency in the social form of conduct and behaviours and the symbolic form of literacy and numeracy privileged by schools. Student’s home culture was seen to be incommensurate and discontinuous with school culture and academic success (Malin, 1989). Several parents and their children understood this and actively sought to inform and equip students in meeting this discrepancy. Teachers as well, but to a lesser extent, expressed an understanding of the need to consciously support students in this transition, especially linguistically.

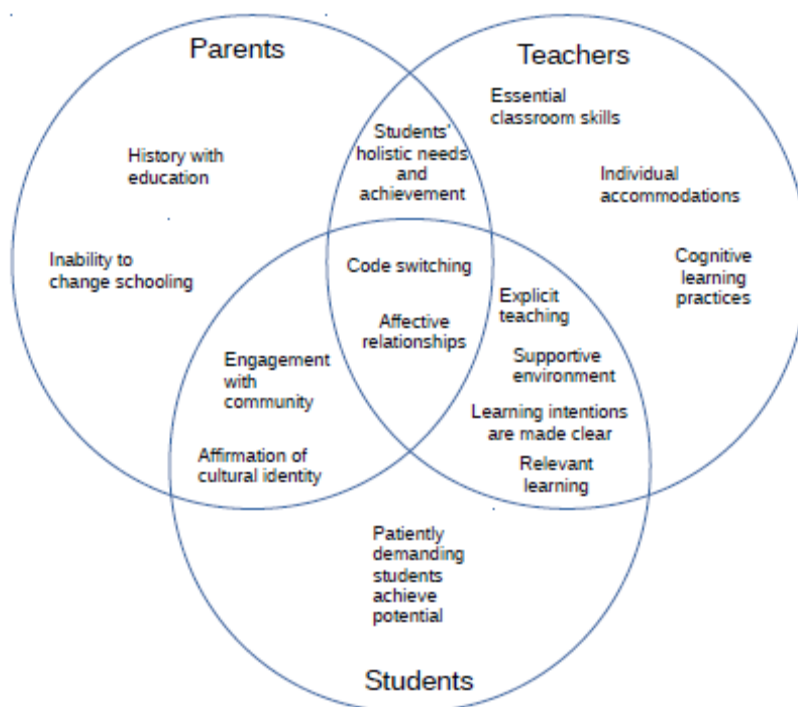


Figure 1: Effective Teaching Practices Reported By Aboriginal Parents, Students and Their Teachers: Comparisons and Contrasts

Finally, we draw attention to the one element of effective teaching expressed by most participants as fundamental to effective teaching practice. All focused strongly on the need for the immediate establishment and continued maintenance of positive relationships in the classroom environment where *each* individual was respected and seen as important through validating actions, especially through time spent individually with supporting students in learning. It is likely that the most commonly mentioned words from all participants, overall, were the words “interested”, “welcome”, “care” and “relationship”. Manifest in the description of the relationships was a priority on caring. Caring

revealed itself in actions — it supported, expected, it challenged, it affirmed and it was responsive to each individual and their situation (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010a, 2010b).

Effective Teaching Profile

In Table 1, we provide detailed description of these characteristics based upon the themes identified through the conversations with students, their parents and carers and teachers. We state these characteristics as questions as a prompt for reflection, taking into consideration many readers of this paper are likely practicing teachers or pre-service teachers. All characteristics are consistently mentioned by community members as attributes of teachers of consequence and, we have found, consistently identified as practices influencing students’ learning in ongoing research in northern Canadian settings (Lewthwaite et al. 2007, 2010), Aotearoa-New Zealand and prior research in the Torres Strait context (1996, 2001). What we also wish to make note of is how community members identified that these characteristics of effective teachers are currently *commonly* being experienced in the Catholic Education Diocese, suggesting to us that the attribute of care claimed in the mandate of Catholic Education is being realised in current practice.

These comments validate the reality for the admonition of the Catholic Education imperative to “provide students with more than just academic instruction. Students from Kindergarten through to Year 12 are educated to develop academically, spiritually, socially, emotionally and physically to become compassionate and contributing members of our world” (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2012).

Table 1: Characteristics Identified as Effective Teaching Practices for a Pedagogy of Consequence

Category	Description
What are my beliefs, values and understandings?	Teachers have the potential to effect reconciliation and redress educational inequities. Building trust through is a considered imperative that influences action. An ethic of care is the foundation for all teaching practices. The belief that all students can achieve to the level expected for their age, despite, and also due to, a diversity of knowledge, culture, language brought to school from home. All students are regarded as having the capacity to learn. Knowledge of the legacy of Australia's educational history and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on curriculum content endows teaching with respect, humility and flexibility. Awareness of community aspirations for their children's education informs teaching.
What characteristics of relationships contribute to learning?	The teachers' role is to facilitate learning; this is achieved through respectful, positive and warm interactions with students. Teachers communicate their regard for all dimensions of learning, including social development, not just academic achievement. Teachers can demonstrate their care for students through verbal and no-verbal interactions outside of the classroom, and pursuit of high expectations in the classroom.
How can building cultural bridges facilitate learning?	Valuing students’ cultural identity includes showing respect for students’ home language and knowledge, family and community, values and beliefs. Furthermore, local community members and cultural knowledges and values are welcomed into the classroom and used to scaffold children’s learning. Education about oppression and authentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are included in the curriculum.

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

Phase Two Quantitative Results

Of the 141 teachers, only 138 were retained in the final analyses because 3 exhibited scoring that indicated ad hoc responses. Latent Trait Theory using the Rasch model was used to assess the instrument for uni-dimensionality and person-item fit. Of the original 83 items 62 items were retained; these were shown to form a unidimensional scale (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015). Results

showed the instrument was unidimensional and reflected seven subscales. As a result, because it is sensitive to nuances in pedagogy it is able to measure nuances in the underlying factors comprising CR pedagogy; consequently it can also measure quality teaching as defined by a range of criteria (Hattie, 2009). The items for the full instrument are reported in Boon and Lewthwaite (2015). Sample items of the CRP instrument grouped by subscale are listed below.

Indigenous Cultural Value

V36 : Resources with local Indigenous content are provided

Explicitness

V10 : Learning objectives are displayed and articulated

Self-regulation Support

V49 : Students are provided with time to ensure mastery of ideas

Ethic of care

V60 : I explicitly encourage learner development in the broad sense not just academic learning

Literacy Teaching

V61 : Basic literacy skills are regularly revised

Behaviour support

V48 : I address off task behaviour with less intrusive correction skills such as non-verbal cues and proximity

Pedagogical Expertise

V68 : Learning and assessment are placed within the broader contexts of what is familiar to students

A summary of the sample of teachers’ CRP and subscale mean scores, range of scores and related statistics is shown in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, literacy teaching behaviours exhibit the greatest variability among all teachers (S.D. 8.43 and Range 46.68) a finding that raises some concerns.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, Range, Minimum and Maximum measures of all scales (N=138)

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S. D.
ethic of care	38.46	37.90	76.36	54.10	7.96
pedagogical expertise	42.45	35.48	77.93	53.51	6.50
literacy teaching	46.68	30.73	77.41	53.85	8.43
behaviour support	39.78	38.24	78.02	54.09	7.98
explicitness	41.05	37.38	78.43	53.83	7.62
self-regulation support	40.60	38.27	78.87	53.39	6.24
Indigenous cultural value	39.14	38.81	77.95	53.30	6.84
total CRP	34.10	40.70	74.80	53.33	5.73

We also wanted to examine the relationships between the overall CRP scale and the subscales that comprised it. It was of interest to us to see that while a

higher overall CRP score was accompanied by higher individual sub-scores, there were strong variations between teachers in the level of endorsement that they declared for the various subscales of the instrument (Figure 1).

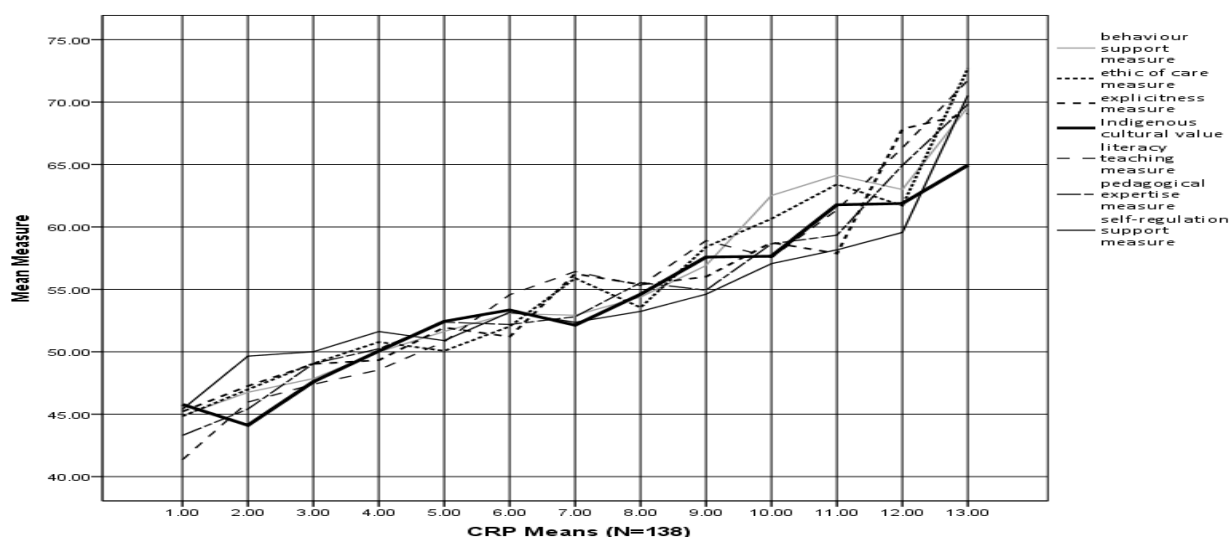


Figure 2: Mean Rasch measures of CRP by all subscales (N=138)

There were clear variations in the teacher CRP profiles when one examined the means of each subscale plotted against the means of the CRP measures (Figure 1); variability which is concealed when one looks at the overall means (Table 1). The least variable subscale is pedagogical expertise, which is clearly closely aligned to overall CRP. In Figure 2, the mean values of the CRP have been calculated by grouping together individuals' whose CRP is within a range of 3-5 points, from a total CRP range of 40.7 to 74.8. Thus a CRP mean of 1 represents the mean of those individuals whose CRP measure was 40.70 to 44.77, a mean of 12 represents those individuals whose CRP measure ranged from 61.3 to 64.9 and so on. It is clear that the subscales deviate considerably from a straight line that might be expected when plotting CRP against each subscale. This deviation is stronger at both ends of the distribution. The subscales that seem to generally fall below the others are self-regulation support and Indigenous cultural value, with a strong variability being demonstrated in literacy teaching as well. There could be various ways of explaining particular teacher CRP profiles. For example, one might infer that a teacher with a CRP mean of 2 (representing 10 teachers in this sample) is likely to be very supportive of self-regulation, but have much lower focus on Indigenous cultural value inclusion in their class, a lower literacy teaching focus and fewer strategies characterising pedagogical expertise. Conversely, a teacher with a CRP mean of 12 (representing 7 teachers) might be predicted to have a strong focus on explicit teaching, literacy teaching and to demonstrate a

range of strategies that characterise pedagogical expertise, but their focus on self-regulation support and Indigenous cultural values is likely to be much lower.

Analyses suggest that some of this variability is related to the teaching context of teachers; that is, whether they are in secondary or elementary schools. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed that significant differences occurred between elementary and secondary teachers in their overall CRP measure ($F(1,136) = 5.89, p < 0.05$), in their Indigenous cultural value ($F(1,136) = 7.18, p < 0.005$), behaviour support ($F(1,136) = 10.12, p < 0.005$), literacy teaching ($F(1,136) = 8.50, p < 0.005$), and pedagogical expertise ($F(1,136) = 4.72, p < 0.05$). These differences are represented in Figure 3.

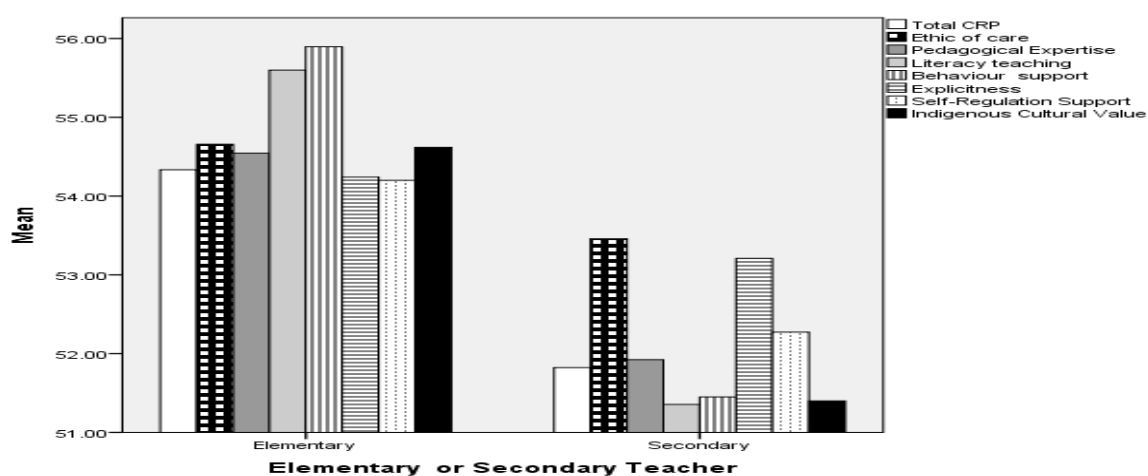


Figure 3: Comparison of mean measures of all subscales for elementary and secondary teachers

Specific differences between elementary and secondary teachers within selected subscales

It was of interest to us to examine more closely the subscales addressing **literacy teaching, self-regulation support, and explicitness** because these are matters that are particularly salient in educational discourse at present, while **Indigenous cultural value** was especially important to the stakeholders in our research, the Indigenous parents, teachers, community members and students. Moreover, The Framework of Australian Professional Standards for Teachers stipulate that teachers must know, design and implement effective teaching strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. At the proficient level, which is the level required for practicing teachers, that requires an ability to implement “...effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”(p.g.

2. AITSL). Moreover, we wanted to examine any differences between elementary and secondary teachers in relation to these subscales because in the transition between elementary and secondary school many students appear to lose momentum. The full data set from 2008, when NAPLAN was introduced, shows some gains at elementary level where there have been statistically significant improvements, including in year 3 reading and year 5 numeracy. In high school however, where students prepare for the workforce, there has been no significant national improvement since 2008 (Ainley & Gebhardt, 2013).

The mean differences between elementary and secondary teacher's pedagogy profiles across the four above mentioned subscales are displayed in Figures 4, 5 and 6 respectively. These figures show the Differential Item Functioning (DIF) of particular items that comprise each subscale so that actual pedagogy differences between elementary and secondary teachers' endorsements of particular teaching behaviours can be examined more closely. Differential Item Functioning (DIF) investigates items in a survey, one at a time, for signs of interactions with sample characteristics, in this case whether the teacher is an elementary or secondary teacher. DIF size shows the size in logits of the item DIF for each group relative to the overall difficulty of each item. This plot is used to see differences between different classification groups, for example primary and secondary teachers.

Cultural value measures were particularly low in those who were secondary teachers (Figure 3). Figure 4 shows that in this cohort of teachers, item 25 (I communicate personally with families) is particularly difficult for secondary teachers to endorse as well as item 47 (Relatives and community Elders are invited to contribute to or observe classroom learning). Whereas item 53 (Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander perspectives are included in all subject areas) was easier for secondary teachers to endorse than for elementary teacher. This might be related to the scheduling that is mandated of a range of topics within schools which demands that particular topics are included in the daily teaching within particular calendar dates across all elementary schools.

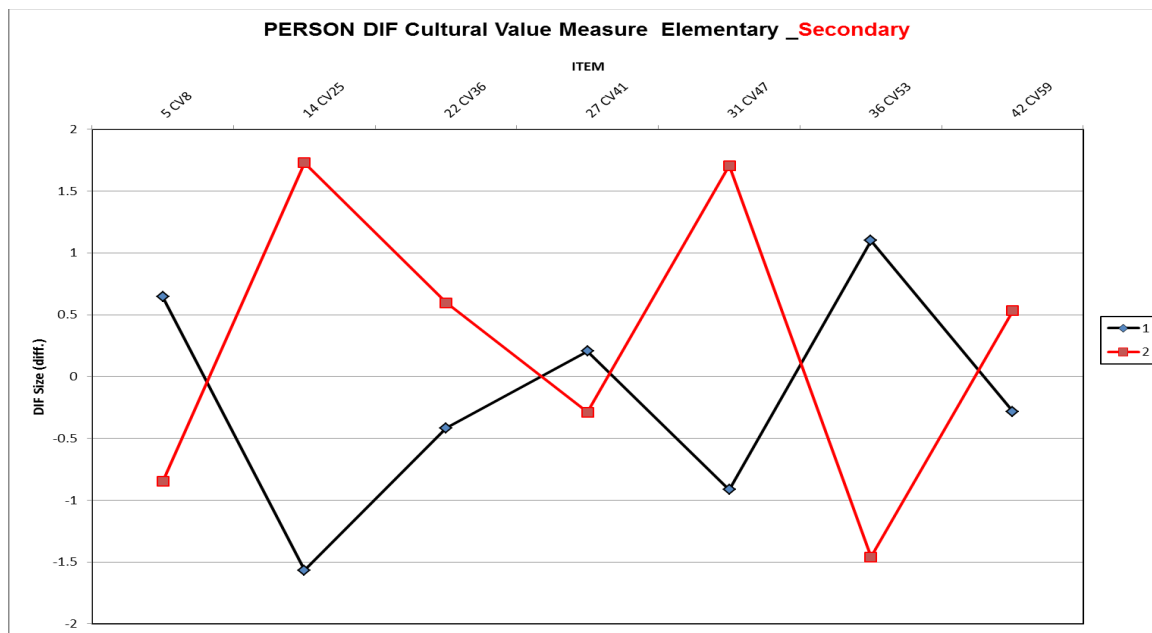


Figure 4: DIF size in logits of the item DIF for elementary and secondary teachers relative to the overall difficulty of each item in cultural value measures

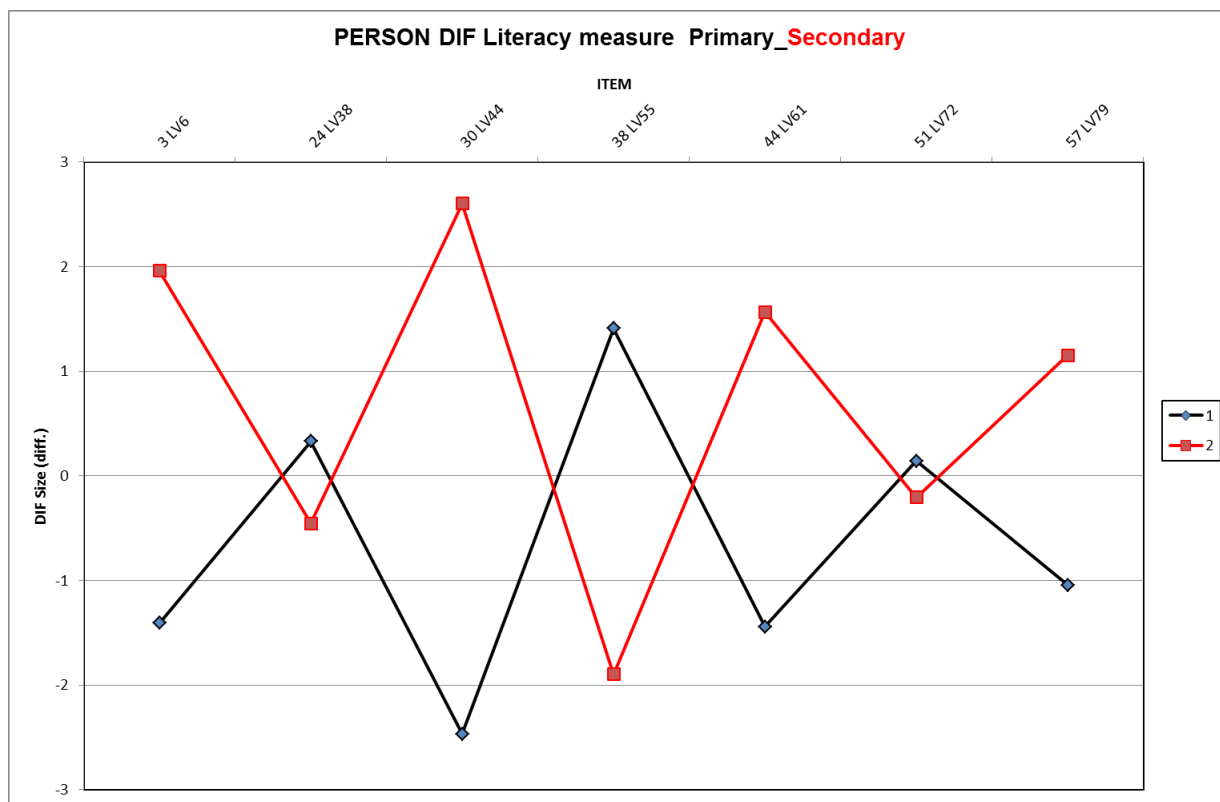


Figure 5: DIF size in logits of the item DIF for elementary and secondary teachers relative to the overall difficulty of each item in literacy measures

Secondary teachers also scored poorly in the realm of literacy teaching compared to elementary teachers (Figure 3) however this might be because

some of the responding teachers were from subject areas other than English. Of course all teachers must teach literacy to their students and so their specialist teaching area should not prohibit them from emphasising the functional vocabulary of their subject area and indeed literacy skills in general. In particular, secondary teachers found it difficult to endorse items (Figure 5):

- V6 : Buddy reading occurs
- V44 : Literacy skills are taught and practiced in the context of modelled age appropriate text
- V61 : Basic literacy skills are regularly revised

This result might relate to appropriate resource materials not being available in the respective schools or it might be connected to behaviour management contingencies (in respect of “buddy reading”); alternatively a difficulty in endorsing V44 and 61 might arise because specialist support teachers come into the classrooms to assist with students who have particular learning needs, and therefore the regular classroom teacher is reliant upon these other support personnel to cater for the literacy needs of their students. Lastly, secondary school teachers might not have the skills or the time to pursue the literacy needs of their students as well as delivering the specific requirements for their specialist areas.

Curiously, elementary teachers were less likely than secondary teachers to endorse item:

- V55 : ESL (English as a second language) strategies are used when teaching students learning English as a second or additional language

Most likely elementary schools do not have the resources or specialist training to support those students who have English as a second language. However, the need for such support is critical in the case of Indigenous students who often speak languages other than English at home and in their communities.

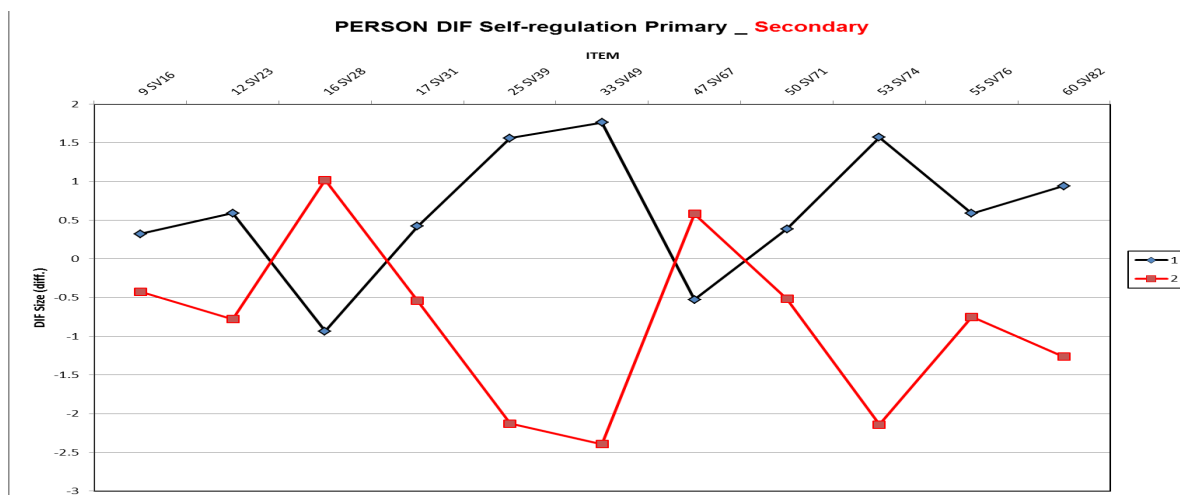


Figure 6: DIF size in logits of the item DIF for elementary and secondary teachers relative to the overall difficulty of each item in self-regulation measures

Self-regulation was of particular interest to us because self-regulated learners are generally more engaged learners since they avoid issues of impulse control and inappropriate behaviour and have greater levels of motivation for learning (Carver & Scheier, 2001). Once again secondary teachers scored lower than elementary teachers overall in their self-reported enactment of these behaviours. However, elementary teachers found it more difficult than secondary teachers to endorse (Figure 6):

- V39 : I act as a learning facilitator
- V49 : Students are provided with time to ensure mastery of ideas
- V74 : Lessons are paced to allow students time for task completion

On the other hand, secondary teachers were less likely to endorse:

- V28: Individual goals for student achievement are established.

Most likely reason could be that they do not have the same amount of time with particular students as elementary teachers do. Nonetheless it of concern that items 39, 49, and 74 were not more consistent behaviours of elementary teachers since such behaviours reinforce self-control and preempt impulsive, disengaged behavior and the need for more effort and time spent on classroom behavior management.

Discussion and Limitations of Phase Two

The instrument constructed and piloted to provide a profile of culturally responsive teaching has much promise. It is able to provide practicing teachers with an overall picture of their teaching against the characteristics that Indigenous students and parents believe are most supportive of learning for Indigenous students. It potentially gives the opportunity to a teacher to reflect on areas which could be moderated to accommodate the needs of Indigenous

students more holistically, or to focus on simply one area which could be in need of adjustment. A particular use of the instrument could be to reflect on the behaviours of those teachers who are in charge of students transitioning to secondary school. This is a time of noted student disengagement so additional attention to the behaviours which could support this transition period will likely prove fruitful. The instrument could also be used by students in a modified form to appraise their teachers, in a research environment, and for Principals to observe and arrange for professional development in to enhance their staff skills appropriately. It is most important to note that the kinds of behaviours measured by the instrument are not only efficacious for Indigenous learners. They are excellent indicators of quality teaching for all students across all years of schooling.

The main limitation of this instrument is that these responses are self-reported. The next phase of the research will establish via observations the occurrence and frequency with which these behaviours occur in the classroom. Most critically we will also measure whether adjustments of these behaviours by particular teachers have a measurable effect on student outcomes.

Summary

The purpose of this study has been to report on the first and second phase of a research and development project focusing on culturally responsive teaching in North Queensland Catholic Education settings. In this first phase of the study, we have attempted to understand what teacher practices would look like that are, indeed, reflective of the participating Aboriginal student and parent preferences. We have, as a research team, used the oral accounts from Aboriginal students and parents about their formal and informal learning of experiences to develop a pedagogical framework that helps to make explicit what culturally responsive teaching would look like. Nel Noddings asserts that the obligation of schools is to be responsive: to listen attentively and respond to the legitimate expressed concerns of communities (1996, 2002). The information presented in this study present the voiced concerns of community members, concerns that reflect a critical awareness of the education and schooling process, both past and present, of their community. Responding to these voiced concerns now becomes the imperative for the schools involved.

In the second phase of the study, we developed through quantitative procedures an instrument that measures teacher cultural pedagogic competence. This instrument illustrates the tremendous variability amongst schools and teachers, especially the variability between primary and secondary teachers.

In response to this, in the next phase of this study we are using the narrative accounts and instrument completion as starting points for engaging teachers in

reconsidering their teaching practices. We believe that these oral accounts and statistical data – that is, the ‘narratives and numbers’ – may challenge many of the practices of Catholic Education teachers. We anticipate that the community’s voice will draw into question the protocols of mainstream classrooms and, in response, promote a dynamic and synergistic relationship between home and community culture and school culture (Ladson-Billings 1995). This questioning ultimately and purposely “problematizes” teaching, upsets the orthodoxy of classrooms, and encourages teachers to ask about the nature of student and teacher relationship, their teaching, the curriculum, and schooling (Ladson-Billings 1995, Gay 2000). By creating this disequilibrium, educators are pushed to seek resolution of these issues to move their classrooms to becoming more culturally responsive as they employ a culturally preferred pedagogy. By so doing unconsciously established institutional and inequitable status hierarchies and patterns of cultural value are de-stabilised (Lingard & Keddie, 2013).

As we move into the third phase of this research project, we seek to determine the utility and efficacy of these responses in all students’ learning – not just Aboriginal students – to ascertain if some of these elements are more or less salient for Indigenous students. As asserted by Lingard and Keddie (2013), we seek a pedagogical theory of the middle ground, a hybrid approach, one that eschews the theory/empiricism and politics/pedagogies binaries and instead seeks to draw teachers into dialogic space where they interrogate assumption, theory, data, politics and pedagogies. By so doing we provide a response to the long called for claims for research that addresses the uneasiness that exists within Australia for an understanding of the influence of a pedagogy of difference through making visible the experiences and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. We seek for teachers to know their students not only better, but at a deeper level drawing into consideration the need for a responsive pedagogy that shows an understanding of culture in its many manifestations, especially its history and how history perpetuates and manifests in the student-teacher interface in classrooms today. It is in this space that education changes or remains the same for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their parents and communities today.

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Note

- 1 Although the Australian Research Grant supporting this research is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (collectively for this paper referred to as Indigenous) students and community members, this research paper

pertains to Aboriginal students and parents only because voluntary participation included only this population.

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