

# CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

With particular focus on Australia's First Peoples

## A Review & Synthesis of the Literature

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## 1.0 Background & Author's Note

Increasingly Australia's population is becoming more and more multicultural with a growing diversity of languages, races, cultures, and values. Culturally responsive services in schooling (Culturally Responsive Schooling, CRS), has been advocated for decades in Australia – although perhaps not always using that terminology. This has been a particular feature of initiatives to 'close the gap' between the achievements of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian children and young people. While the efforts made by jurisdictions, educational organizations and individuals, have achieved localized successes, these have not always been well sustained. Success is often short lived as it has been dependent on the efforts of individuals and groups who have moved on, passed away or withdrawn support.

The need for schools and educational systems to support cultural responsiveness in schooling has become even more essential as a result of increasing proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in schools and increasing multiculturalism as a result of migration and the increase of families entering Australia on humanitarian visas. In addition, the teaching profile in Australia continues to be dominated by non-Indigenous, middle class, European- background educators (see for example, NTDET, 2010c). This means that there is increasingly a mismatch between the culture and expectations of schools and the home cultures of many students.

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on CRS. While special focus is given to this issue, for the schooling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Australia the review also draws on literature from around the world, particularly from the large body of evidence in the United States of America on American Indian and Alaskan Native children.

Whilst cultural responsiveness is needed in service provision for *all* non-mainstream cultures, the focus of this review is aimed squarely on Australia's Indigenous population, primarily due to their prominence as Australia's *first peoples*.

The body of research on CRS is significant and continues to grow. It draws on other literatures including research on multicultural education, cultural difference and diversity, culturally relevant education, 'closing the gap', and cultural competence in schooling and in other service provision. The derivation of the term *Culturally Responsive Schooling* will be discussed along with the term 'cultural responsiveness' which is being found increasingly in the Australian Education context.

For consistency, the term 'Indigenous' is used in this review to refer to 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous' are both used in this review to refer collectively to people who identify as being of Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. According to Human Rights Australia (formerly the Australian Human Rights Commission) (2009) both of these terms are acceptable for referring to Australia's own inhabitants and acknowledging their distinct cultural identities whether they live in urban, regional or remote areas of Australia.

The terms 'peoples' and 'cultures' when used of Indigenous peoples of Australia is used to reflect the plurality and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture groups.

## 2.0 The Policy Context

There are a number of reports and policies that provide a backdrop for the purpose and nature of culturally responsive approaches to service delivery in school education. It is important that readers are aware of these since they form not only a context but also an increasing *national* imperative for CRS that has been building for decades in Australia.

### 2.1 National Legislation and Priorities

Australian federal, state, and territory jurisdictions have passed legislation that prohibits unlawful conduct on the basis of race, colour or ethnic or national origin. The main thrust of this legislation is discrimination which might be direct or indirect. *Direct* racial discrimination occurs where one person is treated differently than another and the basis for the differential treatment is race. *Indirect* discrimination occurs when, across an entire system or organization, equitable treatment of all people results in people from certain racial or ethnic origins being harmed (dePlevitz, 2007). Treating all people the same in attempts to be 'fair' does not acknowledge that not everyone begins life with the same opportunities. In a democratic society 'fairness', 'social justice' and 'equity' are about redressing the inherent disadvantage in society through sometimes inequitable support (*Racismnoway*, NSWDET). The Report of the **Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody**<sup>2</sup> (1991) was a comprehensive summary of Aboriginal law and justice issues, including the underlying causes which bring Aboriginal people into excessive contact with the justice system. The findings of the Royal Commission and its recommendations were widely publicised following their release in May 1991. The recommendations include:

Educating for the future —

*That curricula of schools at all levels should reflect the fact that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters. It is essential that Aboriginal viewpoints, interests, perceptions and expectations are reflected in curricula, teaching and administration of schools.*

In 2009, state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met as the Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA)<sup>3</sup> in Melbourne. At that meeting, Ministers endorsed a set of Educational Goals for Young Australians (*The Melbourne Declaration*).<sup>4</sup>

**Goal One states that:**

*Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.*

In elaborating on this goal, all governments agreed to undertake a range of actions, including to:

- Provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location
- Ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process, including to promote high expectations for the learning outcomes of Indigenous students
- Ensure that the learning outcomes of Indigenous students improve to match those of other students

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and its recommendations: [www.naa.gov.au/publications/fact\\_sheets/fs112.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/publications/fact_sheets/fs112.html)

<sup>3</sup> Formerly The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)

<sup>4</sup> MCEETYA (2008) *The Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians*.

- Ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes
- Reduce the effect of other sources of disadvantage, such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness
- Ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity
- Encourages parents, carers, families, the broader community and young people themselves to hold high expectations for their educational outcomes

**Goal Two states that:**

All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. In elaborating on this goal, all governments agreed to work in collaboration with all school sectors to support all young Australians to know, be and have many qualities and capabilities, including that they:

- Appreciate Australia's social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and have an understanding of Australia's system of government, history and culture
- Understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- Are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life
- Are able to relate to and communicate across cultures

MCEETYA also released ***The National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools***<sup>5</sup> in 2005. The statement emphasises the need for education to focus on developing inter-cultural understanding. This involves the integration of language, culture and learning to help learners know and understand the world around them.

This National Statement also identifies (p.7) that:

*Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have a unique place in Australia's heritage and in its cultural and educational life. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, they are fundamental to strengthening identity and self-esteem. For non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, they provide a focus for development of cultural understanding and reconciliation.*

In 2010 the Commonwealth launched the ***National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy***<sup>6</sup> which has four goals:

1. *Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making*
2. *Equality of access to education services*
3. *Equity of educational participation, and*
4. *Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes*

***The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014***<sup>7</sup> is part of the broad Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform agenda for school education and seeks to progress the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, the Melbourne Declaration.

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<sup>5</sup> National Statement and Plan for Language Education in Australian Schools 2005–2008.  
[http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/languageeducation\\_file.pdf](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/languageeducation_file.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/PolicyGuidelines/Pages/aep.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Ministerial Council for Education, Early childhood Development and Youth Affairs, and Education Services Australia, 2010 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014

Australian Governments agreed to take urgent action to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. The National Indigenous Reform Agreement (2009)<sup>8</sup> was established by COAG to frame the task of *Closing the Gap* in Indigenous disadvantage in Australia. The agreement subtitled *Closing the Gap*, commits all Australian governments to achieving six agreed targets. These are to:

- Close the life expectancy gap within a generation
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within a decade
- Ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years
- Halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
- At least halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020, and
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians within a decade.

These six priorities are to guide effort at local, systemic and national levels for five years: 2010-2014.

Added to the above policies and reports is ***A National Conversation about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Constitutional Recognition***. A Discussion paper released on May 2011 by *You Me Unity*<sup>9</sup>, provided a basis for current national consultations on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Constitutional Recognition by the Indigenous Constitutional Recognition Expert Panel, convened by the Australian government in December 2010. The panel was co-chaired by Professor Patrick Dodson and Mr Mark Leibler AC and their task was to consult with the community and make recommendations by December 2011 on options for constitutional change that could be placed before the people at a future national referendum. The recommendations have been complete at the time of writing, and are being considered by the Australian government.

In 2008 the National Parliament made an apology to Indigenous Australians; this was seen as a major step towards national reconciliation. Australians across the country are engaged in concerted activity aimed at 'Closing the Gap' in order to reduce discrimination and disadvantage.

Australia's Constitution of 1901 however, does not recognize Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; there is no acknowledgement of the place of Indigenous Australians in Australia's history or contemporary society. There is wide support in the Australian community for this constitutional recognition as it is believed to be an important step towards full recognition of Indigenous Australians in Australian society.<sup>10</sup> In particular, recognition in the Constitution would likely – according to experts – improve the mental health of Indigenous Australians since the symbolism of this recognition can inspire action and lead to practical effects.<sup>11</sup> Dr Maria Tomasic, College President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, states *"Recognition in the Constitution would have a positive effect on the self esteem of Indigenous Australians and reinforce their pride in the value of their culture and history. It would make a real difference to the lives of Indigenous Australians"*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.coag.gov.au/coag\\_meeting\\_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA\\_closing\\_the\\_gap.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [www.youmeunity.org.au](http://www.youmeunity.org.au)

<sup>10</sup> Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, A guide to the Issues (2011) *You Me Unity*

<sup>11</sup> Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists 2010

<sup>12</sup> Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists 2010

## 2.2 Self Determination

Self determination is defined as “the act or power of making up one’s own mind about what to think or do, without outside influence or compulsion.”<sup>13</sup> Self-determination is defined by Human Services Victoria<sup>14</sup> as being ‘the right to freely choose a group’s political status and economic, social and cultural development’.

Human Rights Australia maintains that “without self-determination it is not possible for Indigenous Australians to fully overcome the legacy of colonization and dispossession” .They continue “The right to self-determination is based on the simple acknowledgement that Indigenous peoples are Australia’s first people”.<sup>15</sup>

Article 1 of Part 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states that “All peoples have the right of self-determination”.<sup>16</sup> Australia became a signatory to this covenant in 1972 and ratified it in 1980.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, cited earlier, prescribed self-determination as being necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to overcome their previous and continuing, institutionalized disadvantage and domination:

*The thrust of this report is that the elimination of disadvantage requires an end of domination and an empowerment of Aboriginal people; that control of their lives, of their communities must be returned to Aboriginal hands.*<sup>17</sup>

In the *Bringing Them Home* Report (1997), the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (now Human Rights Australia) similarly recommended that self-determination be implemented in relation to the well-being of Indigenous children and young people.<sup>18</sup>

The Australian government rejects self-determination as the basis for Indigenous policy and instead bases policy on the concept of ‘self-empowerment’ which enables a greater sense of responsibility and independence of their programs.

Some states however, use self-determination as an underpinning principle that guides decision-making concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Human Services Victoria (2008) for example, states that “self-determination is the principle grounding a right for Indigenous people to exercise control over matters directly affecting their children, families and communities and as such is important for matters concerning juvenile justice, child welfare, adoption and family law matters”.(p.31)

Whilst recognizing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia’s Constitution would advance reconciliation and promote equity and equality, it still needs to be understood that Australia’s First Peoples live as a minority in a dominant culture. They straddle both cultures in their day to day experiences.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.yourdictionary.com](http://www.yourdictionary.com)

<sup>14</sup> State of Victoria, 2008, Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework

<sup>15</sup> [www.hreoc.gov.au/social\\_justice/info\\_sheet.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/info_sheet.html)

<sup>16</sup> Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, A guide to the Issues (2011) *You Me Unity*

<sup>17</sup> For more information on Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and its recommendations: [www.naa.gov.au/publications/fact\\_sheets/fs112.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/publications/fact_sheets/fs112.html)

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home*, HREOC Sydney, 1997 Recommendation 42

Freire (1972) in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, warned that in acting to support peoples from marginalized cultures, people from the dominant culture of a society need to be aware that they are still part of the dominant culture and as such, must be careful not to 'speak for' or 'do for' those from the marginalized culture. Any collaboration must be one of equal partnership with those from the dominant culture being alert to subtle power dynamics that might tend to imbalance the partnership. A commitment to self-determination by both parties can serve to avoid paternalistic partnerships that might unintentionally disempower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Schools play a major role in reproducing structures of inequality and oppression (Banks & Banks, 2004; Cummins, 1986; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Nieto, 2000). More will be said on this in the following section.

### **2.3 Racism in Schools**

Racism is destructive; it disempowers people by devaluing their identity<sup>19</sup>. It is a social construct and has its roots in the belief that some people are better than or superior to others because they belong to a certain race, ethnic or racial group. Racist attitudes and beliefs are prejudices and misperceptions about people based on racial lines that are often founded in fear of differences which are not understood. These might be differences in language, culture, values, religion, skin colour, child rearing, and world view. These fears can result in racist behaviours that might include harassment, ridicule, putting people down, spreading untruths, exploitation, racial vilification and even assault.

Knowledge of the racism encountered by Indigenous children and young people in schools is essential for understanding the changes needed and how to bring them about. Students may experience racism in schools in a number of ways and from a range of sources including harmful assumptions, paternalism, prejudice, low expectations, stereotypes, violence and biased curriculum materials (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Many behaviours in schools may be racist even if educators do not *deliberately* deliver the behaviours using racist attitudes. Some racist behaviours occur through omission or incorrect assumptions. For example, indirect discrimination (see Section 2.1) may occur when teachers 'treat all their students the same' in an honest, if misguided, attempt to be 'fair' or equitable.

Sleeter (1993) argues that teachers bring their own constructions and perspectives of race to the profession and that these are based mainly on their personal life experiences and vested interests. She goes on to describe how attempts to change these perspectives through increasing the knowledge base of teachers will not necessarily work. One study by Haberman & Post (1992) for example, showed that increased information served to reinforce rather than reconstruct, how (the white student teachers viewed children of colour). Still other studies revealed that the attitudes of (whites) immediately after instruction, improved somewhat but lasting changes and changes to behavior did not result (for example, Grant, 1981; Washington, 1981).

Racism is not always by dominant cultures towards minority groups or non-Indigenous people towards people of a different cultural background. Some Indigenous groups are racist towards others and/or towards other minority groups. Whilst Sarra (2007) maintains that mainstream Australians hold widespread negative perceptions and related negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people which position them as the 'helpless and pitiable other' (p.9), he also showed within his own school that students who were empowered to know and experience their own identity and capabilities, became strong in themselves (Sarra, 2003).

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<sup>19</sup> *Racismnoway: the extent of racism in Australian schools*. <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/about-racism/understanding/index.html>

Williams (1999) on the *Racismnoway* website<sup>20</sup>, asks “ How does a child reach their full potential and exercise their rights as citizens of this country when they are given messages every day that they are worthless human beings?”. The same website maintains that as well as racism being direct, it is “*manifested indirectly, in the form of prejudiced attitudes, lack of recognition of cultural diversity and culturally biased practices*”. These might include that

- the environment of the school reflects the dominant culture
- the pedagogies used by the teacher are disempowering for the students
- the structure and times within the day reflect the ways of operating in a ‘white man’s world’
- the curriculum is non-inclusive
- expected behaviours are those pertaining to behaviours of the dominant culture
- policies concerning attendance, absenteeism, behavioural management, and so on, reflect norms established by the dominant culture.

Whilst many of these behaviours and manifestations will be unpacked in ensuing chapters, they serve to show how the social, cultural, physical, emotional, policy and jurisdictional environment can all act in discriminatory ways in schools and can result in children feeling disempowered and ‘done to’. In addition, the website text cited above points out that those who don’t experience racism themselves frequently don’t recognise it, or even dismiss it as trivial, not seeing its potential for damage. The text continues “the danger is that when racist attitudes and behaviours are permitted to go unchecked in a school, a climate develops which sees these actions as normal and so allows racism to become entrenched”.

As the work of Sarra (2003) showed, students can take control of all these forces, depending largely on attitudes, beliefs, and self-talk. They will not necessarily, or will be unlikely to, do this of their own accord but require modelling and leadership such as that provided by Sarra and other staff at Cherberg School. It should be pointed out however, that not all members of the school community approved of Sarra’s methods, a fact acknowledged by Sarra himself (ABC, 2004).

### **3.0 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures, Identity, Epistemologies and Perspectives**

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 data, approximately 2.5% of Australia’s total population (517 000) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ABS, 2008a). It is estimated that 90% were of Aboriginal origin, 6% were of Torres Strait Islander origin, and 4% were of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (ABS, 2008a). At this time, 32% of Indigenous people lived in Australia’s major cities, 43% lived in regional areas, 9% lived in remote areas and 15% lived in very remote areas (2008b).

Australia’s Indigenous population is spread widely across the country, more-so than non-Indigenous people, despite the majority living in urban settings. A greater proportion of Aboriginal people than non-Indigenous people also live in Northern Australia and in remote areas.

#### **3.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures**

Culture is defined as ‘a body of learned beliefs, traditions, principles, and guides for behaviour that are shared among members of a particular group’ (Zion & Kozleski, 2005).

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<sup>20</sup> *Racismnoway*, The extent of racism in Australian schools. <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/about-racism/understanding/index.html>

Culture has many dimensions including shared language, beliefs, behaviours in transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations, personal space, gender roles, family roles, presence and grooming, value of education, spirituality, and concepts of health and healing. "Culture is the lens through which we look at the world; it is the context within which we operate and make sense of the world and its influences on how we process learning, solve problems, and teach"(Lee. et al, 2007).

Culture is not just about food, dance, dress, music, language and art; Hanley, (1999a) calls these surface culture and folk culture) but it is about the more subtle and deep ways that culture impacts on how individuals see the world and engage with it (St. Onge, P. et al , 2003). This 'deep culture' includes notions of modesty, child rearing practices, patterns of relationships, ordering of time, approaches to problem solving, kinship and roles in relationships, patterns of group decision making, and so on.

It also involves an historical perspective; culture has protected the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through more than two hundred years of colonisation and having a dominant culture imposed on all aspects of their lives. Delpit (1985, p. xiv) describes a 'cultural blindness' that pervades Western society:

"We all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different. We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don't even know they exist? Indeed, many of us don't even realize that our own worlds exist only in our heads and in the cultural institutions we have built to support them. It is as if we are in the middle of a great computer-generated reality game, but the "realities" displayed in various participants' minds are entirely different terrains."

Meyer (1998) compares the world views of Western society with Indigenous world views by comparing the Descartes egocentric notion of 'I think therefore I am' where the needs, rights and desires of the individual lead to comparison and eventually capitalism (Hanlen, 2002, 2007), with Indigenous world views which consider that knowledge of the individual comes through the knowledge of others; that you exist through interaction with others. Hanlen further explains that "education is understood as a lifelong process, not separate from family and other daily routine activities", and that "goals of the community are more important than the goals of the individual. All aspects of life are interconnected and dynamic and social practices are reciprocal, and for ease of explanation, can be described as circular in nature" (Hanlen, 2010). Hughes & More (1997) support this by stating that in the Aboriginal world "The value of things lies in their quality and relatedness. In a world made up of objects related through their spiritual essences, rather than their physical properties, counting is irrelevant". (p.9)

Hanlen (2010) cites her own research and uses the analogy that Western ways of knowing are 'square' and Indigenous ways of knowing are 'circular' and that this consequently "produces difficulties for Aboriginal students when they enter formal school education and for teachers who may not realise that their teaching strategies, good intentions and programs are often not producing successful literacy and educational results". She continues "The children come to school waiting to learn in 'circular' concepts and the teacher teaches using 'square' concepts". (p.3)

Yunkaporta & McGinty (2009) support this in their work with some Aboriginal culture groups, stating "In the Gamilaraay worldview, learning pathways are not direct and the outcomes and the journey are one and the same. This logic can be seen in the language. For example, the word for *search* and *find* is the same – ngaawa-y, and the word manila-y means *hunt*, *search* and *find* simultaneously (Ash, et al 2003). This indicates that the process is as important as the outcome, or rather that the outcomes are integral to the process."(p.62)

Last century, thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families and raised in institutions or fostered-out to non-Aboriginal people.

This was seen as being in the best interests of the children from a world view that perceived all Aboriginal life as neglectful (Van Krieken, 2002). Hunter & Lewis (2006) however, state that “If a child’s identity is denied or denigrated, they are not being looked after. Denying cultural identity is detrimental to their attachment needs, their emotional development, their education and their health.”

The *Bringing them Home Report* (HREOC, 1997) reveals the damage to the self esteem, identity confusion and lack of connectedness that separating children from their families, cultures and communities can create for Aboriginal children. Service industries are still supporting many Aboriginal people through the trauma that this damage has caused, often being felt by the children and extended families of those who personally suffered (Zubrick, et al, 2005).

Regarding the children of these damaged Aboriginal peoples, they develop from a very early age their sense of identity as separate from white society as a result of their distinctive language/s, world view and social values. They learn about dispossession, survival, indifference, negative media images, and racism.(Gribble, 2002; Groome, 1995a).

Aboriginal people believe that as Australia’s First Peoples – recently acknowledged by Australia’s Government in the creation of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples – they are due honour and respect in their land and in the context of history of invasion, racism and cultural abuse.<sup>21</sup> As First Peoples their culture includes a deep sense of belonging and identity, and involves a spiritual and emotional relationship to the land<sup>22</sup> that is uniquely beyond any relationships that other cultural groups migrating to Australia might experience. This demands a national response that is at a different level than a Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CALD) acknowledgement that might be afforded other Australians with diverse cultural backgrounds.

The history of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been one of oppression and resistance. This not only includes the wars of invasion during colonisation but also a ‘cultural resistance’ to policies and Western education (Parbury, 1986).

In cultures with a strong oral tradition – which many groups have, especially in remote Aboriginal communities – trust in government and government institutions needs to constantly be built in relationships since histories are passed down through generations as part of cultural maintenance.

It is difficult to understand culture and its impact on each of us. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Northern Territory live in a mainstream/dominant culture that is very different to their own, for example. In their day to day experiences they bridge both cultures. Most people take their own culture for granted and may not even be able to define it until placed in another culture, when they are forced to consider differences between their own and those of the dominant culture in which they find themselves.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, particularly in remote communities, move in and out of mainstream culture every day as they go to schools steeped in Western values and cultural norms. They see themselves as ‘different’ and if their teachers don’t understand these cultural differences, they can also be made to feel that they are not ‘normal’.

Bazron, et al, (2005) found that although research increasingly indicates the importance of attending to the needs of culturally diverse students, many schools in the U.S. either ignore or down play the strengths of these students and their families as a result of the middle-class European values that generally underpin the culture of schools (Boykin, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Bazron concluded that ‘This cultural disconnect often leads to poor self-concept, discipline problems, and poor academic outcomes’. (p. 83)

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<sup>21</sup> State of Victoria, 2008, Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework

<sup>22</sup> State of Victoria, 2008, Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework

### 3.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identity

“Culture...is the foundation upon which individual identity is built” (Tripcony, 2010, p.7) Aboriginal identity pertains to ancestry and country of origin; about perceiving oneself to be Aboriginal. It is not about genetics or skin colour, but about relationships and obligations with people and place (country), or *kinship* (Dudgeon et al, 2010). When introducing oneself to other Indigenous people, it is important for an Indigenous person to be able to say where they are from (their ‘country’) and the people-group to which they belong. This ‘locates’ a person on a kinship ‘map’ in the same way that Western people locate places using grid references.

Burney (1994), states that “Being Aboriginal has nothing to do with the colour of your skin or the shape of your nose. It is a spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart. It is a unique feeling that may be difficult for non-Aboriginal people to understand.”

Identity/Aboriginality/Indigeneity may have many definitions amongst Indigenous Australians (Huggins, 2007). Huggins explains that Aboriginality is a feeling of one’s own spirituality and forms the core basis of identity, expressed every day through art, language, humour, beliefs and familial and community relationships. Identity is very personal; it evolves for an individual as they grow in the knowledge of their own cultural background, and as they respond to different places and circumstances (Groome, 1995). Identity is not a matter of where an Aboriginal child lives; he/she will identify with aspects of Aboriginal culture whether they live in a remote community or the centre of an urban environment (Gibson, 1993; Guider, 1991).

The system of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship is an internal identity structure which determines the behaviour and responsibility of each individual to each other individual within the society. Similarly, the relationship to the land is fundamental to Aboriginal identity; hence the depth of feeling and intensity in the struggle for land rights.

How Aboriginal people see themselves, their conditions and their own sense of internal identity, affects their perspectives and perceptions of what is external.

### 3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives and Epistemologies

Perspectives are about seeing things differently, however ‘seeing’ from a human standpoint, can be physical, emotional or cultural. The viewpoints formed by individuals depend on their experiences, learning, cultural beliefs and values.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives* are the points of view that Australia’s Indigenous people have. These differ according to the cultural groups they belong to and their experiences. For example, Aboriginal and Islander people have a different perspective of *Australia Day* as an event in Australia’s shared history; for many non-Indigenous this is a day for celebrating the arrival of European settlers in 1788, but for many of Australia’s Indigenous people it is a day of mourning, marking the commencement of ‘invasion and colonisation’ and the start of the erosion of their language, traditions and cultural identity.

Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are closely aligned to nature and the environment with particular emphasis on cycles and patterns and the effect each has on the other. These cultures are based on links to the land, language and culture.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Queensland Studies Authority 2001, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Senior Syllabus* <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/syllabus/2045.html> Education Queensland *The holistic learning and teaching framework* [http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander/educators/cultural-aware-localstory.html](http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander/educators/cultural-aware-localstory.html)

These links affect the perspectives of these cultures. For example, close ties to *country* and the fact that people do not own the land but rather, people belong to the land, affect the way land is treated; not as a commodity or resource but as a living extension of the group; something to be cared for and nurtured. Helen Milroy (HREOC, 2008) speaks about this perspective based on Aboriginal beliefs that the physical environment of each local area was created and shaped by actions of spiritual ancestors:

*"We are part of the Dreaming. We have been in the Dreaming for a long time before we are born on this earth and we will return to this cast landscape at the end of our days. It provides for us during our time on earth, a place to heal, to restore purpose and hope, and to continue our destiny."* (p.14)

Modern contexts have provided Australia's Indigenous people with the opportunity for the land to be used as an economic source, for example in mining and development, whilst still maintaining a strong personal and cultural connection to the landscape and geography, shared over generations; through song, stories and dance.

Similarly kinship, as described in the previous section, plays an important role in identity and hence strongly influences perspectives. Hall (2010) quotes a perspective by an Aboriginal staff member in a remote school as follows:

*'I think that when they first come to our community they have to respect our lore/law, respect our behaviours. Like if you want to come and teach you have to, if you come you have to remember that you are here for teaching only not to become bossy or to take over everything. You are here to be working with indigenous (sic) staff'.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are an important component of Australia's history and cultural heritage. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain their cultural identity whether in urban, rural or remote locations, and engage in a range of cultural practices. The Northern Territory Department of Education and Training states that:

*"Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into school practices can better ensure that the curriculum:*

- is culturally inclusive, valuing all cultures and backgrounds*
- is uniquely Australian, celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies as fundamental to our heritage*
- provides a balanced representation of all Australian peoples, stories, beliefs and practices*
- helps to develop the knowledge and understanding needed by all Australian children*
- is relevant to the learning needs of all Australian students (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, long-term residents and new arrivals)*
- promotes equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students."*

*Source: NTDET (2010c, p.5)*

Although culture is broadly defined some aspects of culture are more important for teachers because they have direct implications for teaching and learning. These include cultural values, traditions, histories (particularly political), communication, learning styles, and relationship patterns. Some of these relate also to Indigenous *epistemologies* (Indigenous knowledge systems, the nature of knowledge and how it is used).

Examples of these might be: whether problem solving is done collaboratively in the community or individually, or both; what protocols exist in the cultural community regarding the ways children interact with adults (and how this plays out between students and teacher); how questioning is used in cultural communication, and so on.

Alberta Education (2007) provides advice for teachers considering 'deep culture' to support teachers to understand cultural differences in student behaviour.

The following table indicates some of the areas of difference:

Perceived Behaviour	Possible Cultural Source
Student avoids eye contact	Casting the eyes down may be a demonstration of respect
Student smiles at seemingly inappropriate times	A smile may be a gesture of respect, meant to avoid offence in difficult situations
Student seems reluctant to engage in debate, speculation, argument or other classroom processes	In some cultures, it is considered inappropriate to openly challenge another's point of view, especially the teacher's

Table 1: Considering Deep Culture: Understanding Cultural Differences in Student Behaviour  
(Source: Alberta Education, 2007)

There has been a plethora of research resulting in descriptions of many of these aspects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in parts of Australia. Perso (2008) infers many of these, drawn from research in her *Reflective Framework for Cultural Competence*. The following extract is taken from this text:

*"Information about students' worlds is important information that teachers need when creating a learning environment<sup>24</sup>. In particular, they need to find out*

- *How students are taught in the home/how have they learned best at school so far?: do they learn by watching? By doing? By listening? Which ones learn holistically (watch the whole behavior repeatedly until they feel confident to 'have a go') or incrementally (learn each little step one at a time and then put them together), or both?*
- *How questioning is used in the home and community?: a dominant question-answer pattern plays a major part in teaching and learning in most Western classrooms since teachers ask questions to find out what their students know. A response of silence (used frequently and in a positive way in Aboriginal conversation) is often interpreted that students are ignorant, shy or don't want to engage. The Aboriginal response to a question will often start with silence because this is the Aboriginal way of communicating<sup>25</sup>. Similarly, Aboriginal children from communities are likely to ask 'who' and 'where' questions rather than 'why' and 'how' questions, reflecting their world view and focus on relationships and country.(Harris, 1981; Christie 1992)*
- *Classroom behaviours: are the students independent learners? Do they take on a lot of responsibility at home? Are they familiar with following instructions from adults – especially those they don't have a relationship with? Are they used to collaborating with peers, offering to help, taking help or requesting help from each other?*
- *Language, semantics and tone: What do you know about the language/s the students speak? Are they written or oral languages? Are they creoles? Are they dialects? Do they speak Aboriginal English? Do they know any Standard Australian English? What phonemes (sounds) do these languages have in common with SAE? Do you know anything about the way language is used in the homes of children; in some Indigenous cultures it may be considered offensive to speak forthrightly, silence in questioning might be used differently, power relations may influence communications, gestures and body language may be as important as oral*

<sup>25</sup> Eades (1993)

language; Are there any SAE words you might use that may be interpreted in different ways (e.g. use 'think carefully' rather than 'try again')?

- Expectations and consequences: do you believe that your students can learn and achieve at high levels and that some are likely to be gifted? Do your students know the expectations and goals you have for them? Do you know what social and cultural language/s your students use in their homes? Are your students used to rules – what are they and what are the consequences that are applied if they break them? Do you know what expectations exist in the homes of the students concerning the concept of 'time'? Would they know what 'five minutes to go' or 'stop work now' mean? Do you know about the level of responsibility and decision-making they have at home? Will they respond to you making decision just because you are their teacher? Do your students understand physical and verbal restraints you might use in the classroom? Will they respond to 'don't touch' or 'stay away'? Do the families of your students understand that continuity of learning is essential to ensure progress and achievement? How do you know?
- Classroom relationships: do you know that you might need to establish closer/different relationships with your Indigenous students than with non-Indigenous students in order to build the trust needed for engagement and respect? ....more than just your name but in a deeper sense? Do you know that the parents of your students might need to know and trust you, the Principal and the school, and the government in order to maximize the attendance of the students? Are you willing to meet with them outside the school grounds to build a relationship with them? Do the parents of your students feel welcome in your classroom? Do your students know your personal classroom management style and what to expect? Did you know that publicly drawing attention to errors of your students is offensive in some cultures? Is this the case for your students? Have you asked parents how they correct errors and mistakes of their children in order not to 'shame' them? Do you know not to embarrass your students by drawing attention to their successes in front of other Indigenous students, families and Teacher Aides?
- Context and relevance: It is likely that your students will deeply engage with tasks that are immediately relevant and meaningful; have you found out whether this is so? Do you know which of your students show persistence with problem solving? Have you asked their families about this? Have you thought how you might harness this for peer tutoring in your classroom? Do you know about the cultural knowledge and skills of the local community and have you considered how you might plan lessons and units of work to harness these settings?
- Knowledge about learning: Do you know whether your students are holistic or incremental learners, or both? Do you know whether they take risks in their learning or wait until they know they are confident before trying something new? Do you know whether your students know how to provide feedback to you? Do they know that it's OK to ask for help and how to do that? Do they prefer to ask peers for help rather than teacher or Teacher Aide? Do you know how ritual is used in homes and community? Is it possible your students are ritualizing tasks as a substitute for learning? How would you know? Can ritualizing be used to scaffold the learning?

(Source: Perso, 2008)

The research underpinning many of the above themes will be elaborated on in Section 5.1.

Of particular interest is an Indigenous perspective on literacy offered by Price (1990) who perceives 'traditional' Aboriginal literacy as "the enshrining of history, heritage and cultures in paintings on bark, on bodies, on cave walls, and in sand, as well as in dance and song: a literacy that was privileged information depending on one's wisdom and maturity." (in Tripcony, 2007, p.6). Tripcony comments on this, saying "This comment demonstrates the different ways of being in the world, and helps us to see that for each of us, our literacy

abilities depend very much upon how we have been socialised at home, our experiences outside the home, and the context in which we are expected to use our skills of reading, viewing, listening, comprehending, analysing, verbalising, writing, etc.” (Tripcony, 2007, p.6). Another form of literacy which should be included in this discussion, is that of ‘reading’ non-verbal language which is still used by many Indigenous Australians today (Enemburu, 1989).

In order to provide culturally responsive service delivery and beneficial programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, we need to go beyond a ‘head knowledge’ and checklist approach since cultural responsiveness is more than ‘doing the right thing’ from a compliance and humanitarian position. Cultural responsiveness results from cultural competence which respects and values the unique identity of each child. A cultural lens helps us to see each child and their relationships from the perspective of their own family and community rather than our own. This perspective ensures that cultural bias is not part of the response.

In remote communities in particular, it is essential that Indigenous teachers, workers, and students are valued for who they are, what they know and the skills they bring with them into the learning environment. Not only is using a strength-based approach essential for relationship building and validating Indigenous cultures, it is also essential for quality teachers to build on what students already know and the way it is embedded in their identities.

Gay, (2000) maintains that Culturally Responsive Teachers appreciate the existing strengths and accomplishments of all students, develop them further in instruction, and use them as a *resource* for teaching and learning.

The risks of not engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in schools are principally those of delivering a biased program, from a white, middle class perspective, using pedagogies and delivery styles that do not take the needs of students into account. In addition, providing a biased view robs the entire student cohort of the richness provided by Indigenous perspectives.

## 4.0 Cultural Competence

During the 1970s there was growing attention across many nations, including Australia, to **cultural awareness**; an initial step towards understanding difference between cultural groups. The focus was on *difference* rather than *diversity*, which includes similarities as well as differences.

This was followed in the early 1980s, with a focus on **cultural sensitivity** which includes not only knowledge that diversity exists between and within cultural groups but a refusal to make value judgments against differences i.e. as being better or worse, more or less intelligent, or right or wrong – they are simply different (Eisenbruch & Volich, 2005). In the context of agencies and communities grappling with the availability of appropriate services to minority groups, emphasis was placed on bilingual/bicultural services and the importance of knowing the culture of the clients.

In the mid 1980s the focus shifted from cultural sensitivity to a demand for **cultural competence**. Cultural competence as a concept was developed in the United States as a result of their health care system seeking to improve access for the increasing diversity of its population and to address inequities in social service delivery to Native American populations (Grote, 2008). In Australia, cultural competence also grew out of developments

of similar and related approaches aimed at making health care systems more inclusive of Indigenous clients (Thomson, 2005).

This shift demanded a transformation to a *skill focus based on the learned cultural knowledge*. By the late 1980s the focus became one of 'us' as well as 'them'. Roberts et al (1990) define cultural competence in a program, as being "A program's ability to honour and respect those beliefs, interpersonal styles, attitudes and behaviours both of families who are clients and the multicultural staff who are providing services". (p.1)

Cultural competence is a term that springs from diversity competence and in particular, can be seen to mean organizational competence in dealing with a diverse client group. Most of the definitions of cultural competence come from the health care industry. This is probably not surprising; a poor or incorrect medical diagnosis due to lack of cultural understanding can prove fatal. Whilst some definitions focus on the knowledge and skills needed to interact successfully with different cultural groups, others focus on attitudes which sit behind the skills and responses delivered. Cultural competence, according to Stewart (2006), implies both *action* and *accountability*, and hence raises the bar.

#### 4.1 Cultural Competence Defined

Cultural competence has been defined as "...a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (Cross, et al 1989, p. iv).

Lee et al (2007) extend this definition, describing cultural competence as "The ability to work effectively across cultures; it is a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system. Cultural competence means understanding one's own identify and values, and how these influence one's perceptions. Cultural competence requires knowledge, skills, experience and the ability to transform these into practices which result in improved services". (p.3)

The Northern Territory Department of Education have adapted and combined these and other definitions for their own purposes:

***Cultural Competence*** is the ability to understand, interact and communicate effectively and with sensitivity, with people from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence is a personal capability that is not necessarily innate but develops over time. A precondition is a deep awareness of one's own identity since it involves examining one's own biases and prejudices. A culturally competent person is able to empathise with how people from other cultures might perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgements about their world. Consequently it has four elements: awareness, attitude, knowledge and skills. (Martin & Vaughn, 2007, Cross et al, 1989)<sup>26</sup>

In addition, *Universities Australia* more specifically defined *Indigenous Cultural Competence* as follows: 'Indigenous cultural competency refers to the ability to understand and value Indigenous perspectives. It provides the basis upon which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians may engage positively in a spirit of mutual respect and reconciliation". (2011)

In comparison with *cultural sensitivity*, which focuses on the importance of knowing and being sensitive to the culture of one's clients, cultural competence is a skill-focused paradigm (Chin, 2000) and is therefore a journey rather than merely a stage in the transition from cultural sensitivity to ***cultural responsiveness***. In order to actively respond in appropriate ways to the needs of clients an agency must first be culturally competent.

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<sup>26</sup> NTDET(2010c)

Whilst there is a range of definitions for cultural competence, all agree that cultural competence for an individual is a personal capability comprised of attitudes, values and beliefs that develop over time through a personal journey (Mason et al., 1996; Ronnau, 1994; Sowers-Hoag & Sandau-Beckler, 1996; Manoleas, 1994; Krajewski-Jaime, Brown, Ziefert, & Kaufman, 1996; Weaver, 1997).

In addition, there is an element that goes beyond objectivity; as Sims (2011) states “Cultural competence requires more than an awareness of Indigenous culture, but a willingness to engage with heart as well as mind; an engagement many service providers find difficult given the mismatch between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures on fundamental beliefs around children, child-rearing and the roles of parents and community.” (p.11)

To become culturally competent one must go through a number of stages on the journey in order to result in culturally competent practice. Stages were developed in an attempt to measure the degree of cultural competence held by organizations and individuals in order to provide advice to them about what was needed for growth and improvement. Researchers disagree about the number of stages but analysis between proposed stages result in stages beginning with **awareness** of one’s own values, attitudes, biases and beliefs and using one’s own culture as a benchmark against which to measure others, to **valuing** diversity and understanding the dynamics of difference, and hence leading to **integrating** the knowledge and skills with professional skills to meet the needs of culturally diverse clients.

These elements or components are interactive i.e. one does not pass through one stage onto the next but the learnings are cumulative and on-going and no one stage is sufficient of itself to bring about desired practice ( McPhatter,1997; Weaver, 1997).

Mason (1993) represented cultural competence on a continuum that enables individuals and organizations to self-reflect about where they are on the journey of cultural competence and hence determine and plan for their own movement or progress, over time. There are five steps on the continuum (Hanley, 1999c):

1. **Cultural destructiveness**, where attitudes, policies and practices are destructive to cultures and consequently individuals within the cultures (e.g. administering psychometric instruments on populations that were not included in the standardization process).
2. **Cultural incapacity**, where the system lacks the capacity to help minority clients or communities (e.g. not providing bilingual personnel when needed, or drawing educational conclusions based on the professional’s world view not on the child’s view, or failing to understand what mistreatment based on cultural background is e.g. using a speech therapist for children who can’t make English language sounds when they haven’t first been explicitly taught how) – decision is not intentionally racist but results in outcomes that are not in the client’s best interests.
3. **Cultural blindness**, where the system functions with an underlying belief that all people are the same and culture and colour make no difference; provides services with the express intent of treating everyone the same, in a misguided attempt to be ‘fair’, and hence not being biased. However, the competencies that minority children develop in the community are often different from those the children are required to demonstrate at school (Ogbu, 1988). So, an example of cultural blindness in a school occurs when a teacher is not aware that children use different social norms at home and in community and punish them for not using those expected at school, when they have never been explicitly taught school norms.
4. **Cultural pre-competence**, when systems and agencies recognize cultural differences and make efforts to improve. For example, these efforts might include hanging an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flag and artworks in the school yard and reception areas, or employing Aboriginal people to work on the school staff.

While these are positive ways to move forward and recognize difference, of themselves they neither ensure cultural competence or positive outcomes for students.

5. **Cultural competence**, when systems, “agencies and individuals accept and respect cultural differences, continue self-assessment of cultural awareness, pay careful attention to the dynamics of cultural differences, continually expand their cultural knowledge and resources, and adopt culturally relevant service models in order to better meet the needs of minority populations” ( Hanley, 1999, p.6). This might be demonstrated through involving the community in the development of the school plan and curriculum, and other decision making processes, or in bringing in members of the community to provide professional learning for teachers and staff in the *ways of knowing* of the community.

It should be noted that moving along the cultural competence continuum is a *lifelong* journey, an ongoing process and an ideal to strive for. Lee et al (2007) refer to Ritter’s research (2007) in stating “Gaining cultural competence is a developmental process which begins with the awareness of one’s own culture, gaining knowledge of other cultures and understanding the way different values intersect. As we move along the continuum of cultural competence and gain proficiency we deepen our understanding of inequity and our ability to help create equity.” (p.6)

Since cultures are constantly changing, cultural competence is not a state that can be achieved or arrived at. Organizations that reach this level of competence need to constantly re-assess as the cultures they work with, including their own, evolve and become more diverse.

Banks (2004) breaks down elements 4. and 5. of this continuum into three elements to show that there are higher levels of cultural competence to achieve as an individual or organization continues to grow. Banks’ levels break the cultural pre-competence and cultural competence levels of Mason into three levels as follows:

- **Emerging cultural competence:** recognizes diversity and inequity and attempts some improvements
- **Basic cultural competence:** accepts and respects differences, recognizes need for systemic change, and
- **Advanced cultural competence:** holds culture in high esteem. Ongoing individual and institutional change to address equity based on informed decision making. (Note that this is the highest degree of Cultural Responsiveness).

The continua of Banks and Mason, and the relationship between them, are shown in the diagram on the following page (see Figure 1).

Organizations, agencies and individuals need to constantly self-reflect on their attitudes, and on the honest and transparent ways they demonstrate their attitudes. They can be at different points on the continuum for different aspects of their work and service provision. For example, a school might make the environment inclusive and be at the *Cultural Pre-Competence* stage with respect to human resource practices, but behavior policies might still reflect assumptions about children and their backgrounds and be based on dominant culture expectations.

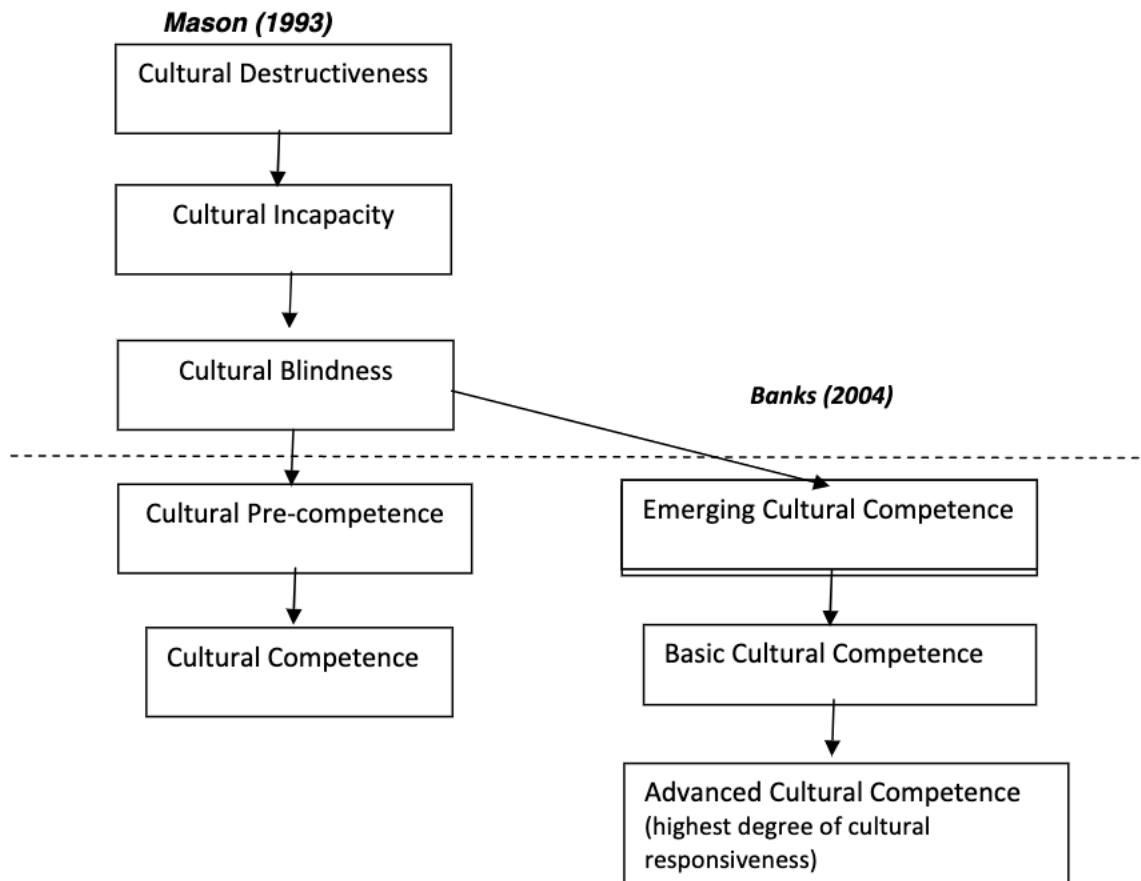


Figure 1: The Cultural Competence Continuum (after Mason, 1993, and Banks, 2004)

## 4.2 Cultural Competence and Cultural Responsiveness

It can be seen from the previous discussion that a clear and shared definition of cultural competence does not exist. Stewart (2006) distinguishes cultural 'competence' and cultural 'competency', defining *competence* as an outcome that describes what someone can do (Tight, 1996) while *competency* is a narrower concept used to label specific skills and abilities that are observable and assessable (Smith, 2005).

The terms 'cultural competence' and 'cultural responsiveness' are often used interchangeably or in the same sentence (Dunbar & Scrymgour, 2009.) However it is unclear what distinction is being made.

The term 'cultural responsiveness' seems to have arisen from legislative and government policies and frameworks that demand and present a 'culturally responsive' service delivery.

For culturally competent practice, knowledge and values must be *integrated* with skills from the field (e.g. social work, health, education), and the skills must be adapted to meet the diverse needs of clients (Weaver, 1997; Manoleas, 1994; Sowers-Hoag & Sandau-Beckler, 1996; Ronnau, 1994). Weaver (1997) explains that the three components of cultural competence (knowledge, skills and values) are interactive and none is sufficient in and of itself to bring about appropriate practice. In addition, she unpacks these three components as follows:

- Knowledge:** Of diversity within a cultural group  
 Of history of groups including laws, policies, loss experienced on all levels and pain resulting  
 Cultural knowledge (communication patterns, world views, belief systems, values (e.g. importance of family, respect for elders)  
 Contemporary realities
- Skills:** General skills (e.g. problem solving: defining the problem and arriving at a solution from an Indigenous<sup>27</sup> perspective)  
 Containment skills (e.g. patience, ability to tolerate silence, listening skills, resisting the impulse to talk to keep the conversation going)
- Values:** Self-awareness  
 Humility and willingness to learn  
 Respect , non-judgmental attitude  
 Social justice (acknowledgement of oppression and the unique status of Indigenous<sup>28</sup> people not based on race but on legislation).

Cultural competence “in practice, for workers...means the *integration* of attitudes, values, knowledge, understanding and skills that enable effective interventions with people from a culture different to their own”. (State of Victoria, 2008, p.23) This indicates that the ‘intervention’ is the ‘response’ through the service delivered. The Victorian Government, in their *Cultural Responsiveness Framework* (2009) views Cultural Responsiveness as “a viable strategy to improve the links between access, equity, quality and safety, better health outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse populations and as a strategy to enhance the cost effectiveness of health service delivery”. (p.13)

In any case, inference and understanding of the terms ‘competence’ and ‘responsiveness’ would seem to imply that ‘cultural responsiveness’ is the delivered *outcome* of the cultural competence (capacity) of an individual or an organization; Cultural responsiveness is that response planned for and delivered that derives from having cultural competence. To be more specific, **Cultural Responsiveness is enacted Cultural Competence.**

The relationship between Cultural competence and cultural Responsiveness is shown diagrammatically on the following page (see Figure 2)

Since cultural competence is an on-going activity and journey of growth and development, an individual or an organization is continually developing in their cultural competence and responding accordingly. This capacity and response must be ongoing and at every level of intervention: systemic, organizational, professional and individual.

Similarly, unless systems, organizations and individuals have the *capacity* to be culturally responsive (i.e. they are culturally competent) they will be unable to deliver a service that is culturally responsive and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Native American’ replaced with ‘Indigenous’

<sup>28</sup> ‘Native American’ replaced with ‘Indigenous’

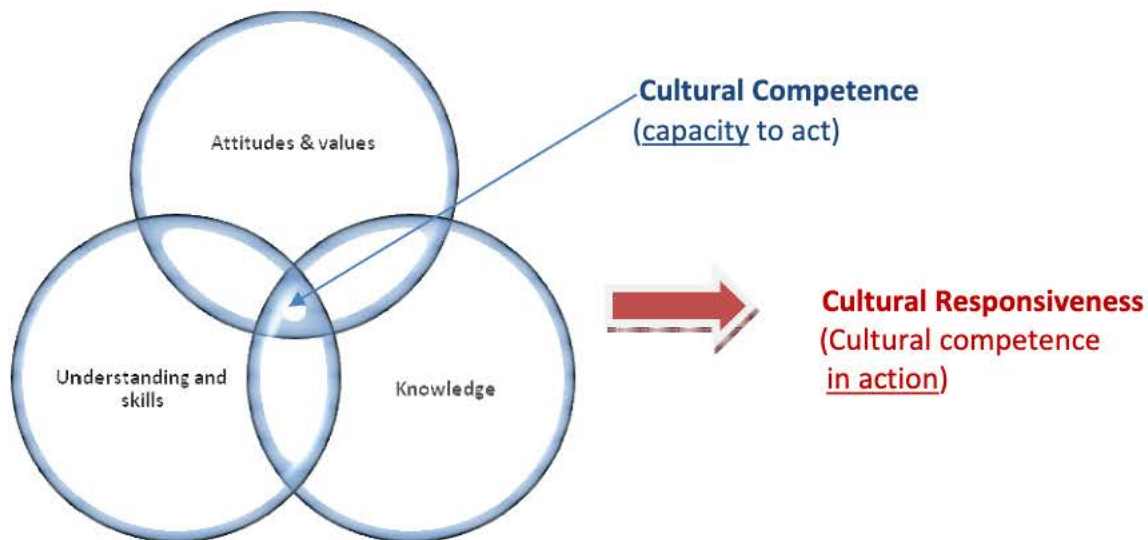


Figure 2: Relationship between Cultural Competence and Cultural Responsiveness (Source: Perso, 2012a)

### 4.3 Culturally Competent Organizations

Cultural competence occurs at a number of levels, these being system, organizational or program, and individual. The system, organization and program levels are frequently treated together as they are generally dependent on shared policies and legislation.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, 2010-2014 (MCEECDYA, 2011) defines a culturally proficient organization as being "... composed of culturally competent individuals who understand and respond to the communities in which they operate and has policies, procedures and structures that promote such culturally competent interactions and ways of working and support its staff to act in this way." (p.44) This definitive statement indicates a response or service function by the individuals at the local level that is supported, enabled and facilitated by systemic policies, procedures and structures. Cultural competence is embedded in this relationship.

In order to provide culturally competent services, according to the US National Centre for Cultural Competence (NCCC) 2006, organizations need to

- Have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behavior and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally
- Have the capacity to become more culturally competent (see below), and
- Incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, and personally involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities.

Cross, et al (1989), King et al (n.d.), and NCCO (2006), list five essential elements contributing to an organization's (including schools) ability to become more culturally competent, these are:

1. Valuing diversity (involves integrating respect for diversity into programs, policies and services and also recognizing that members of certain cultural groups may have cultural as well as individual needs).

2. Having the capacity for cultural self-assessment (organizations develop an awareness of their own cultures and communities, assumptions, and biases and identify actions to reduce such barriers).
3. Being conscious of the 'dynamics' inherent when cultures interact (and pro-actively managing them, improving the interactions between different cultures).
4. Having institutionalized cultural knowledge (and integrating an understanding of different cultures into service delivery and practices), and
5. Having developed adaptations of service delivery reflecting understanding of cultural diversity (cultural knowledge is embedded throughout the hierarchy of the organization and policy, practices, service delivery and behaviours are adapted to fit the cultural diversity of the community engaged).

In committing to cultural competency an organization ensures that this commitment can be seen throughout all levels of the hierarchy. Cultural Competency will then be seen in the organization's

- philosophy
- mission statement
- policy, structures, procedures, practices
- diverse, knowledgeable and skilled workforce
- dedicated resources and incentives
- community engagement and partnerships
- Information published and disseminated, and
- advocacy (NCCC, 2006)<sup>29</sup>

They explain that these five elements should be embedded/manifested at every level of the organization including policy making, administration, and practice. They further maintain that these elements should be reflected in the attitudes, structures, policies and services of the organization.

Roberts et al (1990) believes that a program must be able to honour and respect beliefs, interpersonal styles, attitudes and behaviours of both families who are clients and the multicultural staff who are providing services.

Cross et al (1989) list characteristics of culturally competent agencies and systems as follows:

- Understand, accept and respect cultural differences
- Involve people who are reflective of the diverse groups in the community in the development of policies, services, programs which are appropriate and relevant to them
- Respect difference and pay attention to the dynamics of difference
- Undertake continuous self-assessment
- Expand cultural knowledge and resources
- Adapt their service models to accommodate needs
- Consult with ethno-cultural communities and are committed to hiring culturally competent employees
- Understand the interplay between policy and practice.

Cultural competence at system and organizational level also **requires comprehensive, coordinated planning** that includes interventions to support the efforts of individuals, on levels of policy making, infra-structure building, program administration and evaluation, delivery of service and enabling supports.

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in: Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (2006). Cultural Competence Guidelines and Protocols

In order to become culturally competent, organizations can take a number of steps, including to

- Provide training to all staff to increase their cultural competence
- Provide equal opportunities for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse workers and provision of staff training at appropriate locations, and supervision to assist their professional development
- Consider the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families in program design and development, and involving family and community members in decision-making processes
- Review all agency policies to ensure that they take into account the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families being serviced by the agency and that the policies are inclusive and responsive to the cultural values of all communities being serviced
- Develop partnerships with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse organizations to assist with staff training
- Actively promote programs to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities using translated materials as required, ensuring increased knowledge of and access to services
- Collect relevant data to measure the level of access to services of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families and the quality of services delivered to them
- Translate written materials to suit linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as literacy levels of targeted groups
- Develop evaluation instruments to identify faults that result from lack of cultural competence in the system
- Identify standards for assessing cultural competence which can be used for quality control in the delivery of services across organizations
- Involve community members as liaisons

Adapted from *Strong Bonds Fact Sheet*; Grote (2008)

More recently, the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse processes in Australia (2011) identified themes for successful programs in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. These include:

- Community involvement and engagement
- Adequate resourcing and planned and comprehensive interventions
- Respect for language and culture
- Working together through partnerships, networks, and shared leadership
- Development of social capital
- Recognizing underlying social determinants (e.g. financial disadvantage may affect school readiness and progress for young children)
- Commitment to working with, not for, Indigenous people.
- Creative collaboration that builds bridges between public agencies and the community and coordination between communities, non-government and government to prevent duplication of effort
- Understanding that issues are complex and contextual.

Source: *Closing the Gap Clearinghouse*, AIHW, AIFS (2011)

As indicated above, it seems essential that organizations ensure their employees individually undertake cultural competence training in order to build social capital for the organization. Bean (2006), in his report on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training in the Australian Context<sup>30</sup>, concluded that the effectiveness of cross-cultural training in contributing to the cultural competence of the Australian public sector depended on a number of related elements; cultural competence needs to be linked closely to policy, values, and service

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<sup>30</sup> Prepared for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs on behalf of the Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee

delivery objectives and needs to be “expressed in high levels of political, leadership and managerial support for cross cultural training”. (p.5)

The cultural competence of an organization can be measured in terms of the collective cultural competence of its individuals. As well as determining the current levels of cultural competence of the organization however, an organization needs to determine the current level of cultural competency of its individual employees in order to minimize the range in its responsiveness to acceptable levels.

#### **4.4 Culturally Competent Individuals**

At the individual level, cultural competence may be regarded as “...*the ability to identify and challenge one’s cultural assumptions, one’s values and beliefs. It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another’s eyes, or, at the very least, to recognize that others may view the world through different cultural lenses*” (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 184).

Whereas an organization needs to start by examining mission statements, policies and procedures, an individual, in the quest for cultural competence, needs to examine their personal attitudes and values, and acquisition of the values, knowledge, skills and attributes that allow them to operate appropriately in cross-cultural settings.

For the individual the process of cultural competence involves becoming culturally aware, gaining cultural knowledge and achieving cultural skills (Mays, Siantz & Viehweg, 2002). The movement towards cultural competency involves the diminishing of ethnocentric attitudes, more open behaviours, greater flexibility and non-judgmental perceptions (AOTA Inc.<sup>31</sup>, 2000).

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (2006) drew on the work of AOTA (2000) to describe the attributes that a culturally competent individual is likely to possess. These include:

- A strong knowledge of how one’s own culture shapes attitudes, perceptions and behaviours
- A valuing of diversity and willingness to learn about other people’s cultures
- Specific knowledge of the language, customs, and values of particular cultures
- The skills to feel comfortable and communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds
- An awareness of the limited value of stereotyping individuals from certain cultures or ethnicities.

Emphasis is placed on individuals undertaking self-assessment of their personal attitudes, biases and values (Mason, et al., 1996; Ronnau, 1994; Sowers-Hoag & Sandau-Beckler, 1996). Hanley (1999) states “To work towards cultural competence, we must look within and without for a deeper understanding of ourselves and the cultures of the people we serve.

We must also act on the knowledge, turning our understanding into more effective programs and services.” He continues “The most important ingredient in cultural competence is self-knowledge”. (p.6)

Diversity Training University International (DTUI) isolated four cognitive components for cultural competence; awareness, attitude, knowledge and skills. ‘Attitude’ was added to the original model by Pederson (1988) to emphasize the difference between awareness and a careful examination of personal beliefs and values about cultural differences.

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<sup>31</sup> American Occupational Therapy Association Incorporated

Phuntsog (1998) recognized and acknowledged the challenges of engaging teachers in the process of self-reflection analysis of attitudes and beliefs in order to discover their own negative assumptions and stereotypes. Pewewardy & Hammer (2003) note that this transformative process is not limited to white teachers teaching Indigenous students. Manuelito (2003) found that even Indigenous teachers and community members in Hawaii working with native students must sometimes overcome negative attitudes (resulting from long-term deculturalization and colonization) toward the place of Indigenous culture in the curriculum.

Hanley (1999c) goes on to claim that the second most vital ingredient in (individual) cultural competence is experience since one cannot learn about a people or culture only through books, movies and classes. The best teacher is first-hand experience, he maintains, if not immersion in the community and their culture. The third most important ingredient, according to Hanley, is positive change, or as explained earlier, cultural responsiveness. Cultural awareness and sensitivity are insufficient on their own; behavioural change is essential.

In determining one's own cultural competence, one might ask oneself the following questions:

#### Awareness

- Am I aware of culturally appropriate and inappropriate actions and attitudes?
- Does my behavior or attitudes reflect a prejudice, bias, or stereotypical mind-set? *A culturally competent person recognizes his/her own values and biases and is aware of how they may affect clients from other cultures, understands the importance of diversity within as well as between cultures.*

#### Skill

- Do I have the skill to develop and assess my level of cultural competence?
- What practical experience do I have? *A culturally competent person endeavours to learn more about cultural communities through client interactions, participation in cultural diversity workshops and community events, readings on cultural dynamics, and consultations with community experts.*

#### Knowledge

- Do I have knowledge of cultural practice, protocols and beliefs? *A culturally competent person knows specifics about the particular cultural groups s/he is working with, understands the historical events that may have caused harm to particular cultural groups, respects and is aware of the unique needs of clients from diverse communities.*
- Have I undertaken any cultural development programs?

#### Encounters

- Do I interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons? *A culturally competent person demonstrates comfort with cultural differences that exist between her/himself and clients.*
- Have I worked alongside culturally and linguistically diverse persons? *Culturally competent persons make a continuous effort to understand the other's point of view, demonstrates flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity, and is non-judgmental, maintains a sense of humour and an open mind.*
- Have I worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons or culturally and linguistically diverse groups?

#### Desire

- Do I really want to become culturally competent? *A culturally competent person demonstrates a willingness to relinquish control in encounters with others, to risk failure and to look within for the source of frustration, anger and resistance.*
- What is my motivation?

Source: VOICE Developing a culturally competent organization

## 5.0 Cultural Competence and Responsiveness in School Education

While most definitions for cultural competence derive from the health care sector, Petty (2010, p. 15) provides the following as a useful definition for the education field, arguing that these skills are important for both educators and students:

“a set of values and principles, demonstrated behaviours, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable people to work effectively in cross-cultural settings;

“demonstrated capacity to 1) value diversity, 2) engage in self-reflection on one’s own cultural reference points, conscious and unconscious assumption, biases, power, and areas of growth, 3) build cross-cultural understanding over time with an on-going commitment to continual growth, 4) build knowledge and understanding of historical and current systemic inequities and their impact on specific racial and other demographic groups, 5) adapt to the diversity and cultural contexts of the students, families, and communities served, 6) effectively manage the dynamics of difference, 7) support actions which foster equity (not necessarily equality) of opportunity and services; and “institutionalization, incorporation, evaluation of, and advocating for the above in all aspects of curricular development, instructional practice, leadership, policy-making, administration, practice, and service delivery while systematically involving staff, students, families, key stakeholders, and communities.” (p.15)

Lee et al (2007) describe the outcome of cultural competence in education as “equity in access and opportunity for all students” (p.3). Some might argue that this is surely the desired outcome for all students in education settings. By contrast, Gay (2000) believes the goal of culturally responsive teaching is to improve the academic achievement of students while cultivating their cultural identity.

This outcome will only result if educators deliver actions that result from their cultural competence. Dunbar & Scrymgour (2009) explain that Culturally Responsive Schooling (CRS) has gained momentum internationally where students of culturally diverse backgrounds are a consideration. From their Australian perspective they view work by Gay (2000) and Brayboy & Castagno (2009) as positioning CRS “...as a vehicle through which cultural safety in education settings might be enacted”. (p.7) They continue “(CRS) represents an approach to schooling that privileges the cultural identity and social background of students as essential starting points when designing curriculum and approaches to learning”.

The growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from other minority groups in classrooms, together with the need for schools to report using disaggregated data, has focused the spotlight on the achievement gaps between children of Indigenous backgrounds, non-English speaking backgrounds, those from low-income homes, and mainstream children.

An explanation for these gaps is that there is a ‘mismatch’ between the traditional practices offered in classrooms (mainly white, middle-class) and the home cultures of diverse students and their families (Cummins, 1986; Delpit, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching/schooling is a means (intervention) to address this mismatch.

## 5.1 Cultural Competence in Classrooms; Knowing the Students and their Needs, and Responding through Classroom Management, Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

*Cultural and social diversity is certainly not a new issue facing us humans. It has always existed, and we remain challenged by it, however, the burgeoning complexity of our times calls upon us as educators to face this challenge more directly to value diversity, honour it with integrity, and to preserve the cultural dignity of our students.*

*Lindsey, Roberts & CampbellJones, 2005, (p. xv)*

Novick (1996) in Phuntsog (1998) argues that at the heart of the issue concerning the purpose of schooling is the question: "What kind of society do we want?"(p.62). The majority of educators would respond in ways that promote and include values and qualities of equity and social justice, so that everyone – no matter what background – has equal opportunities. Schools and teachers unquestionably have a significant role in these outcomes being achieved. Phuntsog (1998) found that educators and researchers writing about culturally responsive teaching, generally agreed that what was needed was a transformative curriculum in schools; one that provides opportunities for students to develop their higher-order, critical thinking skills and hence enables them to analyze their situations and transform them by becoming agents for social change.

There is considerable tension nationally and internationally concerning whether schools should teach Indigenous cultural content, and how this should be done. Most Indigenous parents want their children to achieve the standards mandated by the Australian government. However, they do not want this at the expense of culture and identity (Harris & Harris 1988; Harris 1990).

In 1985 the House of Representatives established a select committee on Aboriginal Education which, among other things, identified two key needs for Indigenous education (as expressed by Indigenous people themselves) in Australia. The first was the desire to gain English literacy and numeracy skills, and the second was "the desire to preserve Aboriginal identity and to have education as far as possible provided in their local communities so that children could remain in communities to be raised as Aboriginals." (p.37)

Tripcony (2010) states "I believe we should aim for our children to gain the skills and knowledge to be bi-cultural – to be able to confidently communicate with and/or work within mainstream organizations, while at the same time maintaining their own unique identities and connections with their families, communities and cultures." (p.5)

Fogarty (2010) describes two broad approaches to Indigenous education in Australia: one that privileges educational relevance and the preservation of culture, and the other that focuses on English literacy and numeracy acquisition and disregards context and culture. He goes on to suggest that in remote settings in Australia, there is a need for education to be cognizant of the "need for schooling to connect with the knowledge of the community and to support local development aspirations and need."(p.6)

He describes a specific Northern Territory community that is in transition as a result of an evolving culture and that as a result, learning and schooling programs need to acknowledge and utilize the complementarity and interaction between Western and Indigenous knowledges. Further to this, he states "Indigenous people in remote regions seem to be consistently rejecting some forms of mainstream employment, such as mining, in favour of work that allows them to stay connected to 'Country' and to fulfill kinship and customary obligations." (p.47) This implies a strong need for educators to engage with communities regarding local aspirations for children and the community as a whole; assuming that wanting mainstream Western education implies a desire to have access to mainstream

employment, away from 'Country' has major implications for the nature and style of schooling, particularly with regard to pedagogy and its subsequent impact on participation and engagement.

Campbell (2000), states that "The fundamental issue is that the national agenda and strategies for addressing equity (for Indigenous students) do not meet the diverse requirements and expectations for Indigenous students and their communities." (p. 12)

Theis (1987) writes "Aboriginal people everywhere would like to know about their own culture and history about the Aboriginal way of life. Parents and teachers should work together in growing up kids." (p.41) This 'both ways' schooling supports an approach in schools and classrooms that values both Indigenous and Western knowledge and knowledge systems.

Fogarty (2010) maintains that if the delivery of schooling and curriculum is going to meet the needs of the aspirations of Indigenous people "it must be able to both include Indigenous knowledge and provide mainstream Western education". (p.218) His research makes a strong case for local knowledge and local educational needs to inform the approaches in schooling that provide a reason for students to want to attend school and to learn, (and for families and communities to support their children in doing so), particularly in remote contexts.

Scholars overseas and in Australia (Delpit, 1988, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a & b; Sleeter & Grant, 2003; Theis, 1987) suggest that Indigenous students need to learn about both mainstream culture and their own home cultures in order to be comfortable and co-exist within them. Theis (1987), states "Education should also prepare Aboriginal children to take their place, as Aborigines, in the wider society...the need for children to acquire the same competencies as the children in the mainstream of Australian society." (p.11)

In order to operate successfully in both worlds, minority students need to learn to 'code-switch' (Delpit, 1988; King & Whitfield, 2003) that is, being able to make decisions regarding the use of the rules and codes of the dominant culture. This requires that students initially be explicitly taught these rules and codes. It also means that schools and teachers need to have high expectations for academic success for all students and to hold all students to these expectations by teaching minority students the academic norms, skills and the same learning expectations as their mainstream peers. The affirming attitudes that teachers have towards their students not only shape the expectations held for their learning but also the ways they treat their students, and ultimately, what their students learn (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lucas et al, 1990).

### **5.1.1 Knowing the students and their needs**

At the heart of any culturally responsive teaching program is a genuine knowledge of the students and their needs. This knowledge however, is often determined by the world view held by the teachers, and how they see their students and the families that they come from.

There is national recognition reflected in both the Melbourne Declaration (MCEEDYA, 2008) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan (MCEEDYA, 2010) that in order to ensure equitable learning outcomes for students there needs to be inequitable provision to mitigate against the unequal starting points of children that might be the result of location, environment, trauma, and other circumstances. Being 'ready' to learn is consequently a multidimensional construct that recognizes the interplay between children's individual characteristics and the context/s in which they live (Dockett, et al, 2010).

In order to meet the goals of these national policies, schools go to remarkable lengths to ensure that their students come to the learning environment ready to learn. For example,

some school collect children from their homes, provide breakfast programs, make sure children are warm and well clothed, feel safe and even loved. These approaches are well 'situated' i.e. they are site and situation specific and generally the result of decisions made and enacted by the school and school community itself. A wealth of examples of these can be found by viewing school websites. It is not the intention to explore this range here. Suffice it to say that it is important to recognize that they are all different, and that a 'one-size fits all' approach does not work (Stanley et al, 2003).

**Curriculum** is a broad concept that includes knowledge and content, delivery and teaching, assessment and even reporting to parents. Many writers use the term as a synonym for the content taught in a classroom. For the purposes of this paper, *curriculum* will refer to the formal, documented content or intended learning and hence be defined as the *intended and planned learning proposed by the system, school and classroom teacher*.

**Pedagogy** is the enactment of that curriculum i.e. the methods and delivery styles used by a teacher to bring about the desired learning of the curriculum. Student *behaviour* in the classroom is largely determined by (or an outcome of) the pedagogies used by the classroom teacher and the way that each student experiences the enacted curriculum. Hence, student behavior is largely a product of classroom interaction (or lack of interaction) primarily between teacher and student or student and student/s. Hence curriculum, pedagogy and behavior are closely connected and interdependent. They also depend on school and district enablers such as policy, school leadership and community support; this will be discussed in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Relationships between aspects of curriculum including the intended learning, pedagogy and assessment are shown in the diagram below:

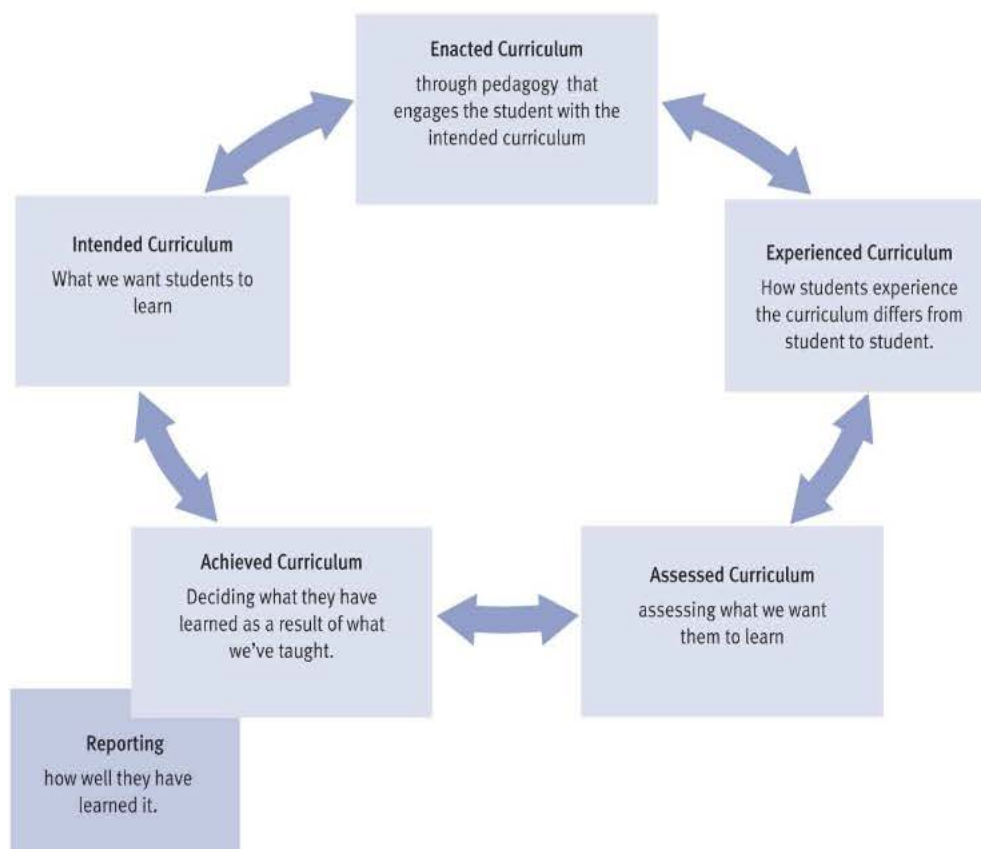


Figure 3: Relationships between aspects of the curriculum

Teachers need to design work units and tasks with knowledge of their students and their needs in mind, particularly the ways in which they learn and the ways that they communicate.

As highlighted earlier, the dominant cultural values that underpin many Australian schools and the curricula they offer are a result of the cultural backgrounds of the majority of teachers: white, middle class. This can not only result in students experiencing a different curriculum to that which is delivered, it can also lead schools to ignore or downplay (undervalue) the strengths of students from different cultures. This will occur particularly if teachers plan their intended learning of a topic or discipline without determining what students already know about that topic or discipline.

Sims (2011), in determining *what works* in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, found that recognizing and validating the strengths that each family/community/culture brings "...is an essential component of demonstrating respect and building a relationship based on trust" (p.6). She also draws attention to the fact that the strengths of Indigenous children and families are often not recognized as strengths in a white, middle class world. This is the result of different perspectives and world views. She concluded that a focus on empowerment, and working from a 'strengths base' makes a difference.

Similarly, Valenzuela (1999) studied Mexican students in U.S. schools and found that schools ignored students' knowledge of Spanish or even treated it as deficit. This can lead to poor self concept and low self-esteem and result in behavioural and discipline problems. In contrast, determining the language skills of the students, valuing, honouring and using them to contribute to the learning program has been proved to result in improved academic performance (Demmert, 2001).

More will be said about the importance of 'strengths-based provision' and determining what children already know and can do in coming to the learning environment, in the section on pedagogy, Section 5.1.4.

### **5.1.2 Classroom Management**

Managing the behavior of students might be viewed by some as pedagogical practice, particularly since it is an on-going activity that occurs during the enactment of the curriculum. Martin & Sugarman (1993) state that "Classroom management refers to those activities of classroom teachers that create a positive classroom climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur". (p.9) Broadly speaking, teachers use classroom management to create a safe environment that maximizes the learning of every student. It is the nature of this environment that enables the delivery of curriculum and the interaction between teacher and student, and student and student/s. Marzano et al (2003) maintains that a well-managed classroom provides an environment in which teaching and learning can flourish.

Research in the US indicates that compared with white students, students of colour (Native America, African-American, and Latino) are disciplined at a disproportionate rate, suspended more often and expelled more, are referred to support staff more often, have higher drop-out rates and lower graduation rates (Tobin & Vincent, 2010). Evidence suggests that this is also the case in Australia although data is not readily available, (Gardiner et al, 1995). This 'discipline gap' is linked to the 'Achievement Gap'.

Other research with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Voltz et al, 2003) found that teachers misreading behaviours of communications patterns of these students and not being prepared to meet their educational needs, can result in teachers believing that the students have a disability and requesting referrals for special education assistance.

Research has found (Trent, Kea & Oh, 2008 and others) that teachers are not adequately prepared to manage behaviours that may be culturally different from their own. Differences in communication styles can also result in students being unfairly disciplined; passionate responses in one culture may be misinterpreted by a teacher as being argumentative for example (Townsend, 2000), or silence on being asked a question, might be interpreted by a teacher as the student not knowing the answer when in fact the student is deeply considering a response; an appropriate behavior in his/her culture (Perso, 2003).

Classroom management styles used by teachers frequently result from the values and practices that stem from the cultural assumptions of the teacher. This can result in their use being inappropriate for students from backgrounds that are not the same as the teacher. Teachers socialized as European Australians for example, might expect answers to questions framed in sequence leading to a logical deduction, from students. For example: What are you doing? *Did I say you could do that? Why do you think I said not to? Do you have a good reason for doing that?* In contrast, Ballinger (1999) found in observing Haitian teachers working with Haitian children, that children responded better to reprimands if the children felt they were being reprimanded because the teacher cared about them, or when the teacher appealed to the values and responsibilities of their group membership and the possibility of bringing shame to their family.

Further to this, Ballinger (1999) admitted that at first the behavior of the Haitian teachers seemed too strict and without empathy or connection, sensible and loaded with moral value. She was forced to examine her own practices.

As a result, she was able, with the help of Haitian colleagues and parents, to achieve a more culturally appropriate classroom management style. It was not possible for her to learn this beyond generalizations she had experienced in pre-service training. Instead it needed to occur *in situ* since it was a local response that was needed.

Hershfeldt et al (2009) supports this view, maintaining that if teachers are to really understand the cultures of their students and behaviours that emanate from them, they need to view their own culture and how it affects their perceptions and decisions about their own behaviours. Aligned to Section 4.4 above, Sheets & Gay (1996) comment:

“Teachers need to understand the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, how they sanction behavior and celebrate accomplishments, and the rules of decorum, deference, and etiquette. They need to understand the value orientations, standards for achievements, social taboos, relational patterns, communication styles, motivational systems, and learning styles of different ethnic groups. These should then be employed in managing the behavior of students, as well as teaching them”. (p.92)

The New York University Steinhardt brief on *Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Strategies* (2008, p.3) defines Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) as “an approach to running classrooms with all children, (not simply for racial/ethnic minority children) in a culturally responsive way.....CRCM is a pedagogical approach that guides the management decisions that teachers make.....Teachers...recognize their biases and values and reflect on how these influence their expectations for behavior and their interactions with students as well as what learning looks like.

They recognize that the goal of classroom management is not to achieve compliance of control but to provide all students with equitable opportunities for learning and they understand that CRCM is “classroom management in the service of social justice” (Weinstein, et al, 2004, p.27).

Weinstein et al (op cit) developed a five-part concept of culturally responsive classroom management from the literature. The concept and suggested strategies for each includes:

1. Recognition of one's own cultural lens and biases  
*Strategies:* write a personal identity story to explore how they fit into a multicultural world
2. Knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds  
*Strategies:* work with students to develop family history projects and share with class; home visits and consulting with family and community
3. Awareness of the broader, social economic and political context  
*Strategies:* study student behaviours deemed as inappropriate and consider whether they might be examples of student resistance to what they see as an unfair system
4. Ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies  
*Strategies relating to environment:* display welcome signs in students' home languages; arrange desks in groups to enable collaborative work; use posters to depict students from different cultural groups.  
*Strategies relating to expectations:* be explicit about expectations; engage students in discussions about school norms; model expected behaviours; provide opportunities for students to practice the behaviours; be aware of inconsistencies in applications of consequences.
5. Commitment to building caring classroom communities  
*Strategies:* ask students to frequently write in their journals regarding "how am I doing as a teacher today?"; get to know students personally in out-of-class time; establish home-school relationships; admire students' bi-lingual ability; be aware of and comment on important events in students' lives (e.g. sport, drama) .

Hershfeldt et al (2009) illustrate how the 'Double-check Framework for Cultural Responsive Practice', developed by Rosenberg (2007) can be used to increase one's own awareness to cultural sensitivities and hence understand student behavior in a more functional way, enabling better intervention planning for problematic students, rather than punishments and exclusions.

The five components of the Double-check Model, are summarized as follows:

1. Reflective Thinking about Children and 'Group Membership' : educators reflect on their own cultural group membership as well as those of their students. Indicators include:
  - Understanding the concept of culture and its importance
  - Being aware of one's own and others' group memberships and histories
  - Considering how past and current circumstances contribute to presenting behaviours
  - Examining one's own attitudes and biases and how they impact on relationships with students
  - Articulating positive and constructive views of difference
  - Making tangible efforts (e.g. home visits, student inventories) to reach out and understand differences (Richards et al 2007).

Research has shown that teachers who engage in self-reflection of this type are more likely to try new strategies that more appropriately match the needs of their students (Gay, 2002; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). For example, a teacher who is aware of the impact of singling a student out by asking him/her to read out aloud independently might ask a small group of students to read out aloud together, have students work independently with a recording device or spend more time with individual students in one-on-one situations.

2. An Authentic Relationship: Research shows that For Indigenous students, this is essential since relationships are of primary importance in Indigenous cultures and society (see Section 5.1.4). Indicators might include:
  - Tangible evidence of warmth, caring and trust
  - Evidence in the classroom of teachers directing positive attention to the student (e.g. providing encouragement and positive support)
  - Teachers showing genuine interest in student's life outside school and their social and emotional needs
  - Teachers truly listening to students
  - Teachers showing sensitivity to the student and recognizing cultural expectations (e.g. not placing student in positions where they might lose face or be 'shamed')

Data shows that positive relationships between students and teachers are associated with fewer behavior problems (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Murray & Greenburg, 2001; McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002). Herbert (2006) states that "It is not always the quality of the teaching that prevents Indigenous students learning – often it's the quality of the relationship between teacher and student, not to mention the school community." (p.84)

3. Effective Communication: communication styles that do not conform to norms and expectations of the teacher can result in misunderstandings that can result in students being punished for poor behaviours.

Culturally responsive educators:

- Consistently communicate high expectations to students
- Understand the communicative function of the students' behaviours (these may need to be ascertained through the students' family or through cultural workers)
- Demonstrate professionalism, civility and respect in interactions with students
- Communicate in non-judgmental ways to students
- Recognize that some students' behavior may be a result of inappropriate code-switching for different contexts (Gay, 2002; Richards et al, 2007)

Since behavior is the strongest form of communication, teachers should learn about the heritage and language of their students, ask questions to aid understanding, use humour, and honour expression of each child. (Gay, 2000; Hinton-Johnson, 2005; Weinstein et al, 2004; Shellshear, 1983; Christie & Harris, 1985; Malcolm et al, 1999; Davies et al, 1997).

4. Connection to Curriculum: Teachers need to connect the intended curriculum to the cultures and backgrounds of students. This must be done by integrating it rather than 'adding it on'. Teachers should be careful not to stereotype this (e.g. use Aboriginal art forms or bush tucker as contexts without checking with families of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to find out whether these contexts do in fact play a role in the lives of their students) as this strategy might serve to further alienate or marginalize students. They should also take care to embed/permeate cultural content across the year rather than for a particular week or month (e.g. NAIDOC Week).

Educators, for example:

- Display visible cultural images that are valued around the room and school, and incorporate them into daily lessons and routines (Montgomery, 2001)
- Select learning activities that are relevant to students' backgrounds, interests, cognitive styles and community
- Are aware of and consider different student learning styles

Research (Gay, 2002; McIntyre, 1996; Ross, Kamman & Coady, 2008) stresses the need for the prevailing attitude in the school and classrooms to reflect the unity between the teacher and the students in their shared goal that the students master the intended learning.

5. Sensitivity to Student's Cultural and Situational Messages: Teachers need to recognize that students from culturally diverse backgrounds may have different behaviours; this helps teachers to respond in culturally responsive ways. When teachers make connections with student's families and communities (including involving families in classroom activities) it communicates a genuine interest and desire to understand. This has shown to be effective in preventing students' misbehaviours (Epstein and Sheldon, (2002). In addition, this has the added advantage of teachers learning from families, thus gaining a greater knowledge of culture and therefore of their students.

Teachers need to understand that some student behaviours result from student's inability to understand the school culture i.e. implicit and explicit behaviours expected by the school, (Cartledge, & Kourea, 2008; Monroe, 2005). These need to be explicitly taught.

Teachers must be aware of how home and community situations influence the behavior of their students, for example their health, poverty, dress, neighbourhood and community expectations.

They must also be aware of different 'obedience expectations' that may exist in cultures (Kearins, 1984) including differences in 'courtesy words' which may or may not exist and the ways that silence is used in communication (West, 1995).

The above discussion provides insight into how classroom management practices can promote or obstruct equity in access of individuals or groups of students to the intended curriculum. In addressing this teachers need to monitor their own behavior to determine equity of treatment.

Nieto (2000) explains that teachers need to question their own traditional assumptions concerning what behavior management styles work and be alert to any mismatches based on culture. In particular, they should consider when to allow flexibility as a result of students' cultural backgrounds and when not to. For example, teachers might accommodate students who want to present work independently so as to refuse to not draw attention to themselves, if their culture values cooperative work, but not when they turn up late because punctuality is not valued in the culture. In this case *students* need to be accommodating and should be explicitly taught how and why to be punctual in schooling. This is best done through critical thinking exercises focusing on cultural differences rather than delivered as a set of norms or blanket rules (Bourdieu, 1991).

Accommodation decisions are best made collaboratively by all staff in the school and should preferably include the school community and parents so that they are involved in the decision-making and can support teachers in their endeavours. This process will also ensure that there is a consistent approach across the school.

Weinstein et al (2004) believe that most problems of student disorder in classrooms can be avoided if good *preventative* management strategies are used by teachers. The paradigm is one of belief in the goal of classroom management being to create an environment where students behave appropriately out of a sense of personal responsibility rather than from fear of punishment or desire for reward.

In addition, teachers should be aware that for Indigenous students, particularly in remote locations, there is a likelihood that they are unable to *hear* what is being said due to *otitis media*, and teachers should be on the alert to identify these students who need additional and more specific support (see Appendix 1). Howard (2004) found that childhood hearing loss contributes significantly to learning and behavioural problems at school, and that Aboriginal children with Conductive Hearing Loss (CHL) caused by *otitis media* were found to tease other children more, be often rejected by peers socially, and be more disruptive in class than other students (Howard, 2005).

Educational institutions and accreditation bodies might develop cultural competence *standards* to ensure teacher and administrator preparation. These same professionals could then collaborate with families to develop school behavior and class management policies that reinforce culturally familiar values to improve children's behavior. The culturally competent teachers might use these policies to avoid more expensive interventions.

### **5.1.3 Curriculum (intended learning)**

The intended or documented curriculum is comprised of all the planned learning for students and includes subject areas as well as cross-curriculum capabilities. Some governments and jurisdictions also mandate the values and behaviours that student should be taught, or should learn. This curriculum is also translated into learning materials, syllabuses and textbooks and used by teachers in designing and planning lessons and units of work.

#### ***Formal/Documented curriculum***

The intended curriculum is formally endorsed in policy frameworks. In developing the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is committed to ensuring that its curriculum work acknowledges the need for all Australian children to '*Understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*<sup>82</sup> (Melbourne Declaration, MCEETYA, 2008 see Section 2.1). ACARA has also consulted with a wide range of Australian Indigenous people in the development of the formal curriculum.

*ACARA has addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives in the Australian Curriculum in two ways: as essential knowledge to be learned through inclusion in specific subject areas such as Australian History, and as a cross-curriculum priority: in every subject area. A set of interconnected organising ideas: Country/Place, Culture, People, are embedded in the content descriptions and elaborations of each learning area.*

With respect to curriculum in the early years, Richardson (2011) states that "the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the (early childhood) program is in response to the (child care) centre's commitment to equity, inclusion, social justice and reconciliation and reflects the deep commitment to diversity that is also acknowledged as one of the guiding principles of the Early Years Learning Framework" (p.13).<sup>33</sup>

Mundine & Giugne (2006) state that "All children have the right to know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right for the true history of Australia to be told. Reconciliation is integral to an early childhood curriculum."(p.15)

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/aboriginal\\_and\\_torres\\_strait\\_islander\\_education.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_education.html)

<sup>33</sup> Early Years Learning Framework:

[http://www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/policy\\_agenda/quality/pages/earlyyearslearningframework.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/policy_agenda/quality/pages/earlyyearslearningframework.aspx)

Giroux (1989) viewed schools as involved in producing aspects of the dominant culture that reproduce inequalities that position and privilege some societal groups but not others. As a result schools need to include teaching about democracy and empowerment so that those who are marginalised can 'find a voice'.

Fogarty (2010) maintains that successful education for Indigenous students in remote locations must provide a space for Indigenous knowledge and connect learning to local community aspirations. He describes instances where curriculum policy documents have allowed for some local negotiation of content and community aspirations but explains that whilst the ideology of this needs to be applauded, lack of resourcing and appropriate supporting structures have made this difficult to realise for teachers. Gribble (2002) would agree, maintaining that while an emphasis is placed, at the practical level, on children's different learning styles and their socio-cultural context, the curriculum does not always empower because teachers are generally unable to define or determine the valued knowledge to be taught, let alone how this knowledge should be taught from different social and cultural perspectives.

The purpose of curriculum in remote locations remains unclear. Some suggest it is to gain employment but the realities of many of these communities impose a limit on the availability of jobs for all students.

Nachtigal (1994) claims that the focus of curriculum needs to shift from being nationally focussed to one that is locally relevant, focusing on the local community context, educating students to create their own jobs and to use the investments in facilities and other available resources in the school to support entrepreneurship and community development. (p.146)

Quaglia and Cobb (1996) contend that schools should help students to understand the relevance of what they are doing in the present to what is in the future for them. This might be particularly relevant for Indigenous students in remote parts of Australia where the labour market can determine the nature of the aspirations of students, many of whom may not wish to leave their communities to seek employment. For this reason, learning in schools where there is no or limited current or foreseeable labour market in the local or nearby community, needs to be situated in today's reality or the immediate past for students to see any relevance.

Clearly education systems and authorities attempt to develop curriculum frameworks that are broad enough to enable community flexibility and the inclusion of local knowledges. It is even expected that curriculum development at local sites will be inclusive, and that is it will enable the experiences of all children to be included in the intended and implemented curriculum.

Gay (2000) suggests that culturally responsive teachers should be able to analyse formal curriculum documents to determine the cultural strengths and weaknesses and make changes to improve overall quality. Their analysis should focus on for example, accuracy, purpose, significance, authenticity of narrative texts, visual illustrations, learning activities and authorial sources. She believes they should be able to recognise racism, stereotyping, distortions, and overemphasis on factual information while minimising values, attitudes, feelings and experiences. They should also attempt to do this with the content presented in multi-literacy formats that students engage with including through the media and popular culture (e.g. television programs, newspapers, electronic games) much of which is inaccurate and prejudicial.

### **Informal curriculum**

The informal curriculum also has a major role in the classroom environment. Images such as symbols, awards, pictures of role models, rules and so on, placed on boards or walls can teach students important lessons; over time students learn to value what is shown and devalue what isn't.

Gay (2000) suggests that culturally responsive teachers are conscious of the power of this type of curriculum and use it to convey important information, values and actions about cultural diversity.

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network in their *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools* (1998) included cultural standards for Curriculum as follows:

A culturally-responsive curriculum

1. Reinforces the integrity of the cultural knowledge that students bring with them
2. Recognizes cultural knowledge as part of a living and constantly adapting system that is grounded in the past, but continues to grow through the present and into the future
3. Uses the local language and cultural knowledge as a foundation for the rest of the curriculum (in particular, utilizes the local language as a base from which to learn the deeper meanings of the local cultural knowledge, values, beliefs and practices)
4. Fosters a complementary relationship across knowledge derived from diverse knowledge systems
5. Situates local knowledge and actions in a global context.

### **Indigenous knowledge and subjects**

Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledge may present initially as being diametrically opposed. Harris (1990) believes that Aboriginal world views stem from spiritual and religious beliefs while Westernized cultures have their roots in science. Christie (in Harris, 1991, p. 13) states that '...the Aboriginal world view provides for the unity and coherence of people, nature, land, and time'. Although it is recognized that Indigenous Australians do not have a world view that is mono-cultural, there are some commonalities in their ways of knowing (Christie, 1992). Watson and Chambers (1989) compare knowledge systems which give rise to ways of operating: They describe Western society as being dominated by economics and competition and explain that this 'world view' results in knowledge that enables measurement and comparison, such as a spatial grid that enables every square centimetre of the planet to be described and labeled and hence managed and controlled. They compare this with that of the Yolngu people in Arnhem Land in Australia who give primacy to a genealogical 'kinship' pattern that enables them to 'locate' every person in the grid in ways that provide instruction about how to relate with each person.

It is evident that these knowledge forms are different, however it is unfortunate (and ethnocentric) that many in the Western world perceive Indigenous knowledges as being primitive and static, and that this view has permeated perception. Knowledges, both Western and Indigenous, are constantly changing, and attempting to keep knowledge forms separate would seem to be impossible. Nygren (1999) asserts that the analysis of knowledge in anthropology should be composed of "continuity in change, traditionality in modernity, and situationality in hybridity". (p.279)

There is no one 'Indigenous knowledge' and hence each knowledge is a product of context. It is for this reason that including Indigenous knowledges in national and state/territory policy curriculum frameworks can only be done at a very broad and generalized level. Nevertheless, national and state/territory curriculum 'frameworks' allow for inclusion of local

knowledges in the local curriculum, and for hybrids of these with Western knowledge to evolve and contribute to, complement, and enhance the other.

In schooling, it is essential that this occur so as not to privilege one knowledge form over another in classrooms which have large proportions of Indigenous students. Presenting Western knowledge as 'the only way' or 'the right way' does not value difference and diversity and is consequently not inclusive, honouring or respectful. At the very least, school subjects should acknowledge the values, perspectives and contributions of students from different cultures and should integrate these into the subject material rather than making these optional to be included if teachers have time (Janiszewska, 1992; Burke et al, 1992; Stairs, 1988).

There must however, be a balance in this 'both/and' curriculum. Gruenwald (2005) notes that the "social and ecological landscape should be studied through first-hand experience", but then provides a caveat that "it must also link such experience to the experience of others in other places and to the cultural, political, economic and ecological forces that connect people and places on a global scale". (p.55)

It is particularly important that there is not an over-emphasis on local knowledges that effectively close off employment pathways for students. This will depend on the nature of the learning and pedagogies used to deliver it; a study of 60 schools across America using place-based education strategies revealed that the teaching of the content and skills in ways that promoted higher-order thinking skills promoted transferability to other contexts. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of the environmental education "helped students to understand the world around them and sharpens their ability to think systematically" (NEETF<sup>34</sup>, 2000, p.13). The students involved in this study also improved in their achievement of reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies as demonstrated on national testing programs against national averages.

In addition to the broad statements about curriculum above, subject specific curriculum should be made more responsive. Some might suggest that this is more about pedagogy than curriculum, but as previously indicated, curriculum and pedagogy are not mutually exclusive. Since curricula must be connected to students' lives and represent their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Agbo, 2001; Skinner, 1999), it should enhance the quality of learning materials, not make it weaker or water it down.

For example, Western mathematics in schools can be enhanced in order to connect with the lives of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. by drawing connections to their lives of students and hence stimulating interest and engagement. Teachers, having investigated the cultural backgrounds and histories of their students through parents and Aboriginal educators and support teachers can embed their subject material with examples and situations from these backgrounds and histories. For example, timelines can be taught using the dates of cave paintings and art works and patterns can be studied following the investigation of pattern in natural cycles that are important in the weather, tides and seasons. Hunting, (1987) states that Western mathematics "will be more accessible to Aboriginal people if the trouble is taken to fit that mathematics sensitively onto and around the beliefs, values thinking patterns and problem solving processes contained in Aboriginal cultures"(p.10).

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<sup>34</sup> [National Environmental and Education and Training Foundation](#)

Similarly in Science, teachers can for example, involve students in their belief systems relating to creation as well as covering the Theory of Evolution.<sup>35</sup> These connections not only make the learning more interesting, they validate student culture and identity.

Fogarty (2010) suggests the use of 'place based' pedagogies (i.e. those that are context specific) that capitalize on the synergies between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. Fogarty's research in a remote part of Western Arnhem Land, revealed that the Aboriginal concepts of *country* - "are a prevailing and underlying precursor of organization in the region", permeating "all levels of the social (fabric) and as such must be prominent in any pedagogic strategy that is aimed at being inclusive of place". (p.219)

It is important that the integration of culture is not trivial, and explicit teaching of the technical language of the subject needed should be regular (Nelson-Barber & Erstrine, 1995; Gilliland, 1995). This is important for all students but particularly for non-English speaking students learning subjects in English or another language that is foreign to them.

In teaching English language, texts that students engage with should be related to the real world and experiences which students engage with daily (Gilliland, 1995; Cleary & Peacock, 1998). Castango and Brayboy (2008) suggest using stories from local communities; collected from Elders and written down by students to support English language and literacy learning. Illustrations that depict these worlds can prove highly effective in engaging students with print. This has been demonstrated through anecdotal evidence of students in Central Australia, the Kimberley region and parts of Central Queensland who have been 'hooked into' print and reading with *the Honey Ant Readers*<sup>36</sup>, one of only a few reading text series written in Australia for speakers of Aboriginal English. These books are illustrated with pictures of family characters using stories from Aboriginal peoples themselves, are situated in 'red centre' locations, and can be related to by students of any age group.

Cultural responsiveness in the teaching of Social Studies units or Australian History topics might include teachers teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective (or, a more culturally appropriate response in inviting an Elder or Indigenous community/staff member to do so), ensuring Indigenous students are given their rightful place as First Australians, inviting students to examine textbooks and history books for bias and stereotypes, and focusing on the traditional owners of the land from which the school population draws and the land on which the school is located.

Not only should the content from subject areas be delivered in culturally responsive ways but the content from subject areas can be *integrated* with Indigenous knowledges to transform it and make it more interesting and relevant. Klump & McNeir (2005) examined case studies in which indigenous knowledge was integrated with academic standards through a hands-on curriculum that centred around Indigenous activities that the local community were involved in. In their words: "Traditional knowledge is carefully integrated with academic standards. A unit on berry picking, for example, asks students to study and identify five types of berries, learn where those berries are traditionally harvested, and then use the berries to create traditional Yup'ik foods. The berry picking activity incorporates benchmarks from science, health and personal/social skills standards". (p.12) Students then demonstrate what they have learned through writing assignments and using technology to create a power-point presentation about making traditional foods. Whilst being vigilant about using the state curriculum standards, the teachers used the Indigenous culture as the pathway to doing so.

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<sup>35</sup> Teachers should be careful to be when teaching any material that might conflict with their traditional values and belief systems or spirituality; some curricular material of experiments may be related to ceremony and hence offensive to students

<sup>36</sup> James, M. (2009) *Honey Ant Readers*. Honey Ant Education.

They conclude “As a result the ...school’s efforts have been positive: enrolment rates have gone up; crime in the community has gone down; stronger connections between students, teachers, and elders have resulted; students are rediscovering aspects of their cultural heritage; and subsistence activities have increased throughout the community”. (p.12)

It is clear that when students can make connections to the curriculum through what they know, their culture and their experiences, they are more engaged and learn better.

### ***Curriculum support materials and textbooks***

Negative stereotypes in curriculum materials can damage self-concept and result in negative behaviours by students (Swisher & Tipperconnic, 1999). Skinner (1999) asserts that when schools present curriculum materials that are biased or not culturally relevant, they ‘rob’ Indigenous students of their cultural pride and personal identities. Common biases found in school curriculum materials include bias by giving credit to one’s own group, calling attention to another groups faults, denying the contribution of a group, constantly creating an impression that only one group is responsible for positive development, failing to ensure that information presented is accurate, ignoring specific information about Indigenous history, and failing to represent *all* facts in a balanced way (Grant & Gillespie, 1993; Cochran-Smith, 1997).

“This (textbook) is talking about the battle of Pinjarra and from a European point of view it’s being presented as the battle of Pinjarra whereas from an Aboriginal point of view, Ngungar, from around the area would present it as a massacre”. (Quote by Ron Bradford, in DETWA, 2002)

These sorts of experiences can leave Aboriginal children feeling alienated in classrooms. “To expect Aboriginal students to learn from textbooks and a school curriculum that comes solely from the dominant Anglo culture is to ask them to accept their own irrelevance.” (Quote from Michelle White, in DETWA, 2002)

If bias is detected in curriculum materials it is essential that students and communities work together to create alternatives that support students to learn the intended curriculum through different materials and pathways.

Since good teachers know their students and how they learn, know the content to be taught and how best to teach it, know that this involves knowing the students’ interests, home backgrounds, languages and cultures<sup>37</sup>, it is surprising that schools do not engage more in this activity. In addition, Powers et al (2003) and Reyhner (1992 a & b) found in their work with American First Nations people, that mainstream curriculum generally trivializes and stereotypes tribal cultures, that teachers rely heavily on textbooks that do not include experiences of Indigenous peoples, and the curriculum materials used with Native American students are often remedial.

### ***Language and culture***

In the U.S. federal education policy for over a century beginning in the 1870’s, emphasized assimilation by excluding Indigenous languages and culture in Western schooling. (Lipka, 2002) this resulted in a weakening of Indigenous languages and cultures and resulted in students being alienated from the goals of schooling, and producing high school leaving rates. Deyle & Swisher (1997) state “Leaving local knowledge and language at the schoolhouse door was resulting in ‘subtractive bilingualism’, that is, many students were failing to attain academic competence in English while at the same time losing knowledge of their Indigenous languages and cultures”.

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<sup>37</sup>Department of Education, Early Childhood and Workplace Relations (2011) *National Professional Standards for Teachers*

The *Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act* of 1975 initiated a new era of revitalizing and restoring Indigenous languages and cultures through schools. (Demmert, 2001) the implemented approach focused on providing the opportunity for students to use Indigenous knowledge and language to meet local and Western education goals (Deyle & Swisher ,1997; Swisher & Tipperconnic, 1999; Yazzie, 1999).

Demmert (2001), in an extensive review of policy studies, research, and evaluation studies, consistently found that the academic performances of Indigenous students are improved when schools promote the language and culture of the local community in their curricula.

Partington (2002) provides an analysis of the role of language in Indigenous schooling in Australia since the 1970s. He explains that before the 1980s Aboriginal languages were often regarded as a deficit for a child (p.117). During the '70s and '80s there was a growing emphasis placed on bilingual education which the Northern Territory embraced on a significant scale in the 1970s. Lee (1993) describes this model in the Northern Territory as not being successful (citing Harris & Jones, 1991). However, she does not finish there, describing other benefits to the community of the bilingual program including the pride generated in the community by the program and the education of adults, particularly their "increased confidence and competence to demand a greater say in the way their schools are run...". (p.7)

Nakata (1995) believed that for his people to move forward they needed to use the language and perspectives of those who had constructed Indigenous people as marginalized. He explained that they need to make themselves understood in the mainstream context by learning English language. Aboriginal languages, he maintains, should be used to help them understand how the English language works. Using Aboriginal languages to scaffold the learning of a new language, whilst not being the same as a 'bilingual program' would seem to be good pedagogical practice.

Whilst the issue of bilingual education remains charged mainly due to the place of language in identity, culture and language maintenance, self-determination, empowerment and power relations, it seems that it may have a place in meeting the dual needs of Indigenous Education as defined by the House of Representatives (see Section 5.1) in 'preservation of Indigenous culture'. This begs the question: *'to what extent is this the role of the school?'*

The issue in the Northern Territory remains unresolved concerning the value of bilingual programs with respect to the English language learning outcomes of students. Whilst some schools show significant positive gains in student achievement, others do not, and this seems to be the result of a number of other factors, including the provision of necessary resources and attendance.

Partington (2002) describes the 'two-way schooling' model of the '80s and '90s, which largely derived from bilingual programs and operated by keeping the Aboriginal culture and Western culture domains separate, requiring "effective local leadership in educational issues, availability of skilled personnel, cooperation by non-Indigenous educators and time and resources to develop the Indigenous curriculum" for success (p.120). As a result, he maintains, this type of schooling would not extend to large numbers of Indigenous communities. He continues, "By the mid 1990s language development was firmly lodged within cultural relevance in the more advanced programs".

Holm & Holm (1995) & McCarty (1993) described two schools – Rick Point and Rough Rock community schools, both on Navajo reservations, which provided examples where teachers experimented with culturally responsive schooling in the community's native language.

Outcomes included Navajo children learning their own language at no expense to their knowledge of English, achieving higher scores on mathematics and reading in standardized tests, and increased confidence and pride among students.

Since culture includes knowledge and associated values, beliefs and epistemologies, teachers need to be aware that cultural differences are generally not evident in the intended curriculum.

Literacy for example, might for some minority students be a long oral tradition learned through story-telling, whereas for mainstream students and in the formal curriculum, it is about genres. Teachers need to be aware of these differences in order to 'build bridges' by scaffolding learning from what students know to what they are required to know. This will be discussed further in the following section.

#### **5.1.4 Pedagogy**

Pedagogy is the enacted or delivered curriculum. The way it is enacted, or the *teaching* that results, will depend on how teachers read and interpret the formal intended curriculum documents and their attention to the needs of the students in their classes. This interpretation and the resulting response can be different for each student and for groups of students. It is this *crafting* of the appropriate response demanded by individual students that sets accomplished teachers apart from those without this expertise. In particular, *culturally responsive teachers* attend to the needs of their students from diverse cultural backgrounds in ways that maximize their learning and enable them to feel safe.

Fogarty, (2010) points out that, in remote parts of Australia, regardless of the formal written curriculum, policy positions, notions of social justice and tensions between personal freedom and cultural maintenance, in the end provision "will always come down to a set of formative pedagogic moments where a student either learns or does not". He continues "It is because of this, that the design and nature of the pedagogy that creates and supports these moments must remain a paramount consideration." (p.217) He goes on to describe 'place based pedagogies' that enable a greater connection between the lived experience and aspirations of Indigenous students and their communities, and schooling and work.

He suggests that a pedagogical framework is needed "to enable the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in pedagogic design and a connection between this knowledge and Indigenous development realities in remote communities." (p.218)

Gay (2002) defines *culturally responsive teaching* as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. She bases this definition on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated in the life experiences and situations that students are in, they are more meaningful and more easily learned. Research indicates that when ethnically diverse students are taught through their own experiential and cultural filters, academic achievement improves (Au & Kawakamai, 1994; Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hollins, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a&b).

The definitions for cultural competence outlined in previous sections, together with the research cited here, indicate that in order to be culturally responsive, teaching requires that teachers have *specific* knowledge of the language, customs, and values of the cultural groups with which they are working. Hanley's research (1999c) would also suggest that this knowledge should be learned 'in situ' or 'on the job' since first-hand experience – if not immersion – is essential.

In a culturally-responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported and learner-centred context where the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement (Richards, et al., 2007).

Frigo (1999) found that pedagogical strategies benefiting Aboriginal students include strong teacher-student relationships, reduce competition between students, restrict verbal communication between students, limit direct questioning by the teacher, and emphasise practice experience and group cooperation.

Trouw (1999) identified fourteen 'culturally inclusive pedagogies' as follows

1. The environment of the school reflects the community and students (in this context referring to books, media and displays etc used for teaching, and cultural backgrounds of staff in proportion to students).
2. Students' previous experiences are incorporated into the classroom; (Ernst (1994) stated that teachers need to "create opportunities for students to perceive the significance of what they have and know with what the language and culture of school offers them." (p. 321)
3. Students need to be empowered by their education i.e. pedagogies themselves need to be empowering, not just the materials and resources used. Strategies need to be both respectful and challenging. [Bartolme (1994) maintains that teachers and students should interact and negotiate meaning as equals, since this will result in students empowering themselves to succeed rather than waiting for and expecting teachers to 'drip-feed' knowledge in an effort to maintain control and authority.] Such pedagogies include negotiating the curriculum and assessment mode, and those that promote communication and collaboration among students. Teachers should model behaviours and thinking processes out aloud, giving hints, providing feedback and redirecting when needed. Activities and reflection should enable students to set their own goals, self regulate, and self assess.
4. Teaching must be explicit; [Bartolme (1994) suggests that the structure of text types in particular, needs to be made explicit in academic settings to assist students to identify comprehension strategies needed].
5. Teachers and students need to build up a pool of shared experiences; the process of schooling can be a mystery to many students because the goals and purpose are not revealed. Joint activities such as reading a book, watching or discussing a film, going on a field trip and so on, can create a shared mental context for new learning.
6. Learning process should be responsive to a variety of learning styles; teachers should not rely on techniques that are supposed to be appropriate for a particular minority group due to the wide range of home experiences that often exist within the group. Personal and individual stories are needed. A wide variety of teaching styles is needed for a wide variety of students. This does not mean each child has a different approach – rather that by using a variety of styles continually will maximise the opportunity for each student's preferred style to be used more often.
7. Heterogeneous grouping; this will ensure that children learn from each other, broadening the base of shared knowledge and culture rather than grouping disadvantaged or advantaged children together, minimising their experiences and outreach.
8. Students need to learn the culture of Western Schooling; Edwards & Mercer (1987) believe that ritual learning, where understanding is embedded in the learning activity without any knowledge of what is the intended learning of the activity, is a result of inadequate teaching. Fundamentally, inadequate teaching occurs when teachers do not draw out the learning through prompting self-reflection and higher-order thinking (such as inference and evaluation) about the

activity. They maintain "...there is no final handover of knowledge and control to the students". (p. 130) This may also occur as a result of teachers assuming students will naturally do this themselves.

9. Students need to develop higher-order thinking skills; these include critical thinking, meta-cognition, and inquiry skills. Jackson (1993/4) claims that a cultural mismatch may occur which could disadvantage some children who are not taught meta-cognitive skills in the home, and that teachers need to explicitly teach these skills.
10. Teacher/Pupil interaction; Edwards & Mercer (1987) point out the classroom interaction is determined by the significance of persons, place and time, and cultural knowledge. Teachers tend to dominate classroom talk, often by asking a question and then following up with another question when an answer is given (Cullican, n.d.). Teachers use this process to continually check whether there is shared understanding as the basis for continuing the discourse. This can render students as passive learners rather than active. Edwards and Mercer, cited above, recommend that students should interact before, during and after lessons through activities that enable them to personalise knowledge, for example by paraphrasing, explaining, and valuing through creative means. Quality feedback should also be given during these interactions and activities. The feedback must however, relate to *quality* of learning rather than physical attributes such as artefacts produced and neatness.
11. Emotional needs of students must be addressed; Teachers need to build a sense of trust with their students since this builds confidence and hence self-efficacy, and a belief that what they are doing in class is worthwhile (Jackson, 1993/4). Tepper (1992) believes that teachers need to create what she calls a 'classroom family'; a loving relationship based on respect, support and trust which students can count on to take risks. She also believes that teacher discipline should not violate this trust.
12. High expectations; teachers need to believe that their students can achieve what is expected (i.e. for their same age cohort) and to show this by their behaviours, including the tasks they set students to achieve desired goals. Rutter, et al (1979) found that, "Schools that foster high self-esteem and that promote social and scholastic success reduce the likelihood of emotional and behavioural disturbance". (p.83)
13. Parents should be encouraged to participate in decision-making processes of education; (Jackson, 1993/4; Burke, 1993) this will be further discussed in Section 5.2.2
14. Teachers must develop skills necessary to teach in multi-lingual classrooms; this will be further developed later in this section.

These 'culturally inclusive pedagogies' (some of which are in fact learning goals) identified by Trouw describe good teacher practice for all students, not just those from non-mainstream cultures. Trouw's research successfully uses scaffolding of these inclusive pedagogies to improve learning outcomes for Indigenous children.

The research clearly focuses on pedagogies and teaching styles that can be grouped as those that are learner-centred, relating to teacher/student relationships, about subject matter and presentation being relevant and interesting for students, those relating to scaffolding learning *from* and situating the learning *in* students' worlds, student learning styles, teacher high expectations, and pedagogies specific to the needs of English as Second language/English as Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learners. Findings are synthesised as below.

### ***Learner-centred and 'strengths-based'***

The successful enactment of the curriculum – or the act of teaching – requires that teachers are learner-centred. This means that they

- understand the intended learning,
- can identify when a student has been successful in attaining those intentions
- understand what the student understands on coming to the task, and
- know enough about the content to provide meaningful and challenging experiences in some sort of sequential development (Hattie, 2009, p.23).

Foundational to this enactment, is teacher understanding of what the student understands on coming to the task (or brings with them to the learning situation). For a culturally responsive teacher this means understanding

- the skills and strengths of the student as they approach the task (some of these will be cultural and linguistic)
- the values and perspectives of the intended learning that the student may have on the content presented, and the consequent impact on their understanding and desire to learn, and
- a sense of where the content to be learned 'sits' on a continuum from the starting point of what the student knows to that of the new content, (this is so that the content can be broken down into 'achievable chunks' towards the desired learning goal).

Vygotsky (1978) argues that the most effective teaching is that which occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), that is, when the challenge presented by the task is just ahead of the learner's actual or current development (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

In order to determine what learning experience to offer students, a culturally responsive teacher would need to have not only knowledge of the students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but also knowledge of the students' interests and home life/environment. In addition to this, an authentic and trusting relationship with the student is necessary so that students will engage with the task.

This Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) facilitates and supports the achievement of *all* students, not just those from culturally diverse backgrounds (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).

Proponents of CRP argue that recognition of cultural diversity, although necessary for all students, is *imperative* to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 1995) and to situate the intended learning in meaningful and relevant tasks. This recognition includes understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups (Gay, 2002).

Perso (2008) suggests that teachers need to know as much about their students as possible; *Who are they? What is in their 'virtual school bag'? What do they already know? How do they learn?* She suggests that this information be gathered about every student in the class by

- talking with parents, families, community members, previous teachers of the students, current school staff, Indigenous Teacher Aides and Assistant Teachers
- talking to the students themselves

- analyzing student acquisition of Standard Australian English<sup>38</sup>, and
- analyzing individual student achievement data, especially regarding literacy and numeracy achievement.

In particular, Aboriginal Assistant Teachers and Teacher Aides in classrooms are not only an invaluable source of information for teachers wishing to find out more about individual students and home practices, their mere presence also helps children to adjust to the world of school as a result of close association and shared practices with them in most communities. They are also often an important means of countering the cultural biases of many teachers.

Weinstein et al (2004) draw on other research (Grossman, 1995; Kottler, 1994; and Sileo & Prater, 1998) to suggest questions that can be asked to find out about students' family backgrounds, educational experiences and cultural norms and values:

1. Family background and structure: Where were the students born? How long have they lived here? What is the hierarchy of authority? What responsibilities do students have at home? Is learning English a priority?
2. Education: How much schooling have the students had? Do they attend regularly? What strategies are used to teach them? Is there emphasis on group instruction, memorization? What were the expectations for appropriate behavior? Are students expected to be active or passive? Independent or dependent? Peer or teacher oriented? Cooperative or competitive?
3. Interpersonal relationship styles: Do cultural norms emphasize working for the good of the group or individual achievement? What are the norms for behavior between males and females? What is a 'comfortable personal space'? Do students obey or question authority figures? Are expressions of emotion and feelings emphasized or hidden?
4. Discipline: Do adults ask in permissive, authoritative, or authoritarian ways? What kinds of rewards, praise, criticism and punishment are customary? Are they administered privately or publicly? To the group or the individual?
5. Time and space: How do students think about time? Is punctuality expected or is time considered flexible? How important is speed in completing a task?
6. Religion: What restrictions are there concerning topics that should not be discussed in school?
7. Food: What is eaten? What is not eaten?
8. Health and Hygiene: How are illnesses treated and by whom? What is considered to be the cause? What are the norms with respect to seeking professional help for emotional and psychological problems?
9. History, traditions and holidays: Which events and people are sources of pride for the group? To what extent does the group in the United States (Australia) identify with the history and traditions for the country of origin? What holidays and celebrations are considered appropriate for observing in school?

Teachers should show caution in asking questions and be particularly careful to use words that parents understand or use a translator or bilingual Teacher Aide, particularly if English is not spoken in the family.

### **Relationships**

"Aboriginal students respond best when there are positive personal relationships with teachers" (Matthews et al, 2003). Collins (1993) adds "It is often more important who does the teaching than what is actually taught". (p.7) Gribble (2002) concurs maintaining that the

<sup>38</sup> See Northern Territory Curriculum Framework ESL outcomes, including records of progress over time and class overview of ESL levels, as well as <http://www.learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=40548> and other continua used for this purpose

relationships established by teachers with their Aboriginal students are critical if students are to succeed.

The distinction between *knowing about the students* and *knowing the students* is important. Knowing *about* someone is an intellectual task; knowing them requires a relationship based on mutual respect. A great deal has been written about the importance of teacher-student relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their teachers (see for example, Burney, 1982; Christie, 1984; Christie & Harris, 1985; Harris, S., 1990; Partington, 1998; Watson & Chambers, 1989).

This importance cannot be over-emphasized. Tripcony (2007) argued that "...teachers must be able to recognize indigenous students, and accept their Indigenous identity and the background and life experiences that they bring with them to the classroom". (p. 4)

As Aboriginal children are growing up decision-making is shared among family members. There is however, increasing emphasis on the child's autonomy, independence and social equality (Kearins, 1984; Malin, 1990; Partington & McCudden, 1992). Teachers need to be aware that these children do not defer to adults – particularly on the basis of position or title – but are extremely independent, having had responsibility for themselves and often younger siblings before they reach school age. Their individualism is reined in by their kinship groups by whom they are disciplined through 'shame' (ridicule that creates embarrassment and hurt pride) (Malin, 1990).

To harness this individual decision-making ability in pedagogy, teachers should involve their students in planning learning experiences and in choosing contexts, activities and even how they will demonstrate their learning (see Section 5.1.4 on assessment).

### ***Relevance and interest***

Gay (2000) suggests that cultural information constitutes the first essential component of the knowledge base of culturally responsive teaching. The second requirement, maintains Gay, is acquiring detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups. By this she means understanding the significant contributions to disciplines and subject areas that ethnic groups have made. She explains that this information is needed to make schooling more interesting and stimulating for ethnically diverse students. If the teacher presents content by situating it in an ethnic culture or positioning it in a way that values that culture, students will feel valued and validated and hence be more motivated to learn.

Ladson-Billings (1994) explains that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional and political learning in their students by "...using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes". (p. 382) She studied instruction in classrooms and observed that culturally responsive teachers used cultural referents as a result of their understanding that not only was academic achievement important, but so was the maintenance of cultural identity and heritage. She also observed that in classrooms where students were part of a collective effort designed to encourage academic *and* cultural excellence, teachers clearly expressed their expectations, skills were taught and interpersonal relations were exhibited. (Gay, 2000) found that in these classrooms students behaved like members of an extended family; they assisted, supported, and encouraged each other.

They were also held accountable as part of a larger group and everyone was required and expected to make certain that each member of the group was successful. Teachers responded to the students' need for a sense of belonging by promoting this academic community of learners. They honoured their human dignity and promoted their individual self-concept and self esteem. This links closely to the findings of Ballanger (1999, see

Section 5.1) where Indigenous educators appealed to the values and responsibilities of their group as a classroom management strategy.

There is evidence that, to be effective in multicultural classrooms, teachers must relate the intended curriculum and pedagogies used to enact it to the cultural backgrounds of their students; if they don't they will provoke resistance by students. Teaching that responds to the backgrounds of students – particularly norms of behavior and communication, prompts student involvement (Olneck, 1995).

Perso (2003) summed up her research by concluding that what is needed in teaching Aboriginal children for numeracy attainment is the *integration* of

1. Knowledge of the Aboriginal people and their cultures,
2. Knowledge of the mathematical understandings embedded in the culture that the children had and brought with them to the learning environment, and
3. Explicit mathematics teaching.

The research indicates that situating the intended learning in cultural knowledge and backgrounds of students, and responding in ways that recognize existing knowledge and skill as a *strength*, builds self-concept and self-esteem and hence increases engagement and learning.

### ***Scaffolding and situating learning***

If teachers are to build on from what students already know to what they need to know, it is essential that they situate the learning in what is known and familiar to students, and use pedagogical scaffolding to 'build the bridge' to the intended learning. For example, Aboriginal children from remote contexts may have little use for quantification of numbers; numbers may be used in a nominal /labeling sense (e.g. on football jumpers, number plates) but not in a cardinal (quantity/counting/for comparison) sense. This is supported in the traditional languages of many Aboriginal groups for which words for amounts beyond 4, 7 or 13 do not exist. Many Aboriginal people still use 'big mobs' to describe large amounts, and 'big big mobs' or 'biiiii-iig mobs' to describe more than that. Hughes & More (1997) state "Aboriginal languages contain very few numbers and have few terms for the objective contrasting and comparison of physical objects". (p.9)

This indicates that being able to compare amounts was not – and still might not be – a needed skill in some traditional Indigenous communities. Teachers wanting to teach students to compare large quantities might need to consider a context for when this skill might be needed that can be situated in the realities of their students.

This might be done through discussions with Aboriginal Teacher Aides to determine cultural contexts, or using (or creating) a shared experience that can act as a foundation for the learning (e.g. a football match or season generating statistics).

Situating new learning in what students already know, and using cultural examples wherever possible, will have the added benefit of students' knowledge being valued (Lipka & Mohatt, 1998; Moses & Cob, 2001). Pedagogical scaffolding is used to bridge prior learning to new learning, the known to the unknown and abstraction to the realities of student's lives.

Yunkaporta in his *8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning Framework* (n.d) explains that Aboriginal culture has used narrative pedagogy (using personal and wider stories) for teaching and learning. He explains that the use of these stories – and through inviting local members of the community to share theirs – grounded learning in what is part of students' reality, and that as a result, this "story-telling and sharing was found to be the cornerstone of successful lessons." (p.70) Examples of this are described in Yunkaporta & McGinty (2009) where local stories involving ancestors and the land were the basis for the creation of new knowledge. They describe how this knowledge construction fully engaged the students and "...allowed

the inclusion of Spirit in the learning process. Knowledge was seen as a spiritual force, with knowledge production as a sacred or ceremonial duty to be performed". (p.68) They proceeded to describe how the Indigenous knowledge used in the lessons gave the students confidence and helped them believe that they could do the work. In addition, their research team eventually realized, that practical activities undertaken with the students need an "intellectual component grounded in Indigenised learning protocols" (p.68) rather than the unstructured activities lacking intellectual rigor they had used in the past. Yunkaporta (2009) explains the learning protocol referred to here as the approach to communal learning developed by the students who drew on the Gamilaraay group meeting symbol (a circle surrounded with 'c' shapes facing the centre) compared with a 'western' copyright symbol (a 'c' shape surrounded by a circle) which the students reframed as 'a greedy person sitting alone and keeping knowledge for himself.' (p.97) This learning 'communal' protocol was referred to in Yunkaporta's study in resolving disputes over resources and information, and clearly reflects what might be called an *Indigenous Learning Style* i.e. a preferred style of learning used by Indigenous children in a learning environment.

### **Learning styles**

There is a relationship between culture and learning style that unfortunately is difficult to measure. However, it seems that ways of learning derive principally from child rearing practices that reflect ways of knowing and doing – they are not genetically determined. Cognitive style as related to culture was studied extensively with Indigenous learners around the world and similarities nevertheless emerged (Gardiner, 1986; Vyas, 1988; Yu & Bain, 1985; Vernon, et al, 1988; Berry, 1976). These studies indicate that there is considerable within-group variation; that while some differences arise as a result of cultural practices they should not be assumed.

If over-generalizations are made about the preferred learning styles of Indigenous and minority children, there is a risk of stereotyping. What can result is a biased pedagogy that may result in the needs of some children not being addressed through the pedagogies used. Just as there are many Indigenous cultures, so there are many Indigenous learning styles. However, statements about 'likelihood' are helpful in alerting teachers to possibilities and 'what they might be on the lookout for' that might alert them to how to meet the individual needs of their students.

In designing learning tasks teachers need to consider the learning styles of their students; do they learn best by doing, listening, watching, working independently, and so on. Much has been written on the preferred learning styles of Indigenous children including discussions about their usefulness and incorporation into classroom pedagogies (Harris, 1980; Christie, 1985; Hughes, More & Williams, 2004, Pewewardy, 2002). However it should be noted with caution that *all* children learn through a range of styles and some might prefer one or two styles over others. Teachers cater for all these needs and preferences in a class situation by attending to all of them to a greater or lesser extent.

Teachers need to remember that all children sit on a broad continuum of ways of learning and that it may be best to deal with this through better understanding of cultural epistemologies (see Section 3.3).

However, it is important that teachers not make assumptions that their students will learn best using methods that *worked for themselves*. This is important for all students, not only those from different cultural backgrounds. Teaching that is teacher-centred and that focuses on direct instruction and oral presentation may not work for many students. If students are taught primarily through watching adults and older siblings, encouraged to 'have a go' when they feel confident to do so, not directly told they are wrong but chided through humour and 'shame', and so on, then there will clearly be a mismatch if teachers don't use pedagogies that match these 'home expectations' whilst gradually incorporating others as needed and

through explicit instruction. As indicated in Section 3.3 teachers need to find out information about instruction in the homes and cultures of their students and ‘bridge’ the cultural divide through appropriate scaffolding and using a variety of pedagogical approaches.

In general, learning styles and ways of learning are closely linked to the senses: using sight, smell, hearing and touch. Teachers need to utilize all these senses in their teaching practices, recognizing that most students will have a preferred learning style but will also learn to a lesser extent through the others as well. Teachers, with help from families, should try to determine each child’s preferred learning style/s so that they can be supported in ways that maximize their learning, especially if they need targeted support in some areas (Hughes, More & Williams, 2004).

Hughes and More (1997), collaborating on *Aboriginal Ways of Learning and Learning Styles*, agree on and present five ways of learning that are different between Indigenous (Australian and Canadian) and mainstream learning styles, as follows:

<b><u>Traditional Aboriginal Learning Styles</u></b> (If students are from traditional Indigenous backgrounds it is likely they have a preference for...)	<b>Mainstream Learning styles</b>
Observation and imitation	Verbal and oral instruction
Personal trial/ and error, and feedback	Verbal instruction accompanied by demonstration
Real life performance/learning from life experiences	Practice in contrived/artificial settings
Mastering context specific skills	Abstract context-free principles that can be applied in new, previously inexperienced situations
Person oriented (focus on people and relationships)	Information oriented
Spontaneous learning	Structured learning
Holistic learning	Sequential and linear learning

Table 2: Learning styles compared: Aboriginal and Mainstream (after Hughes & More, 1997)

These findings concerning Australian Aboriginal learning styles are validated and extended by a broad range of research as follows:

<b><u>Aboriginal Learning Style</u></b> (If students are from traditional Indigenous backgrounds it is likely they have a preference for...)	<b>Research</b>
<b>Observation and imitation</b> rather than verbal instruction and written approaches Balance between teacher direction and student autonomy; students supported to work autonomously and creatively	Harris & Malin, 1994; Harris, 1980; Hughes, 1992 Yunkaporta, 2009
<b>Personal trial and feedback</b> ; students prefer to try things privately and decide when they are ready to demonstrate acquired skills, feedback refines the learning (e.g. riding a bike)	Harris & Harris, 1988; More, 1989; Harris, 1980
<b>Real life performance</b> ; learning occurs in specific contexts – in non-Aboriginal settings, particularly school, it is de-contextualized	Kearins, 1984; Harris, 1980; 1984;

<b>Mastering context specific skills</b>	Harris, 1980; Kearins, 1984
<b>Non-linear methods;</b> teacher returning to concepts and repetition to deepen learning. Use of 'learning maps' to map out the direction of learning in a display so students can see 'where it leads'. Blending common elements of different cultures.	Yunkaporta, 2007 Taylor, 2003; Yunkaporta, 2009
<b>Person oriented;</b> (the group is more important than the individual) the purpose of learning is to benefit the group, and learning as a group is apparently more important than learning as an individual (Watson, 1991) found that Aboriginal students in urban locations learn best in small groups based on gender or Aboriginality)	Harris, 1984; Andrews & Hughes, 1988; Harris, 1980; Harrison, 2008
<b>Informal and Non-verbal</b> whilst schooling is mostly based on two-way interaction	Frigo, 1999
Students feel 'shamed' when publicly and individually asked to answer questions	Malin, 1990; Groome, 1995
<b>Holistic learning;</b> global teaching strategies (looking at the big picture before looking at the details)	Hughes, 1988; Harris, 1980;1984; Yunkaporta, 2009; Harrison, 2008
<b>Scaffolding</b> (breaking down the learning and building it up again from something familiar and known)	Harrison, 2008;
<b>Visual-spatial skills</b> (not just about 'seeing' but about processing and coding information). Using symbols and images to make visual metaphors.	Hughes, 1992; Yunkaporta, 2009
<b>Situating learning in what is meaningful and relevant;</b> situated in community (local indigenous knowledge enables higher order thinking and problem solving)	Craven, 1999; Yunkaporta, 2009
<b>Using narratives and story-telling</b> (including visual metaphors)	Yunkaporta, 2009; Craven, 1999
<b>Abstract Imagery</b> (Aboriginal students use mind-images to locate; this style also used to learn the Aboriginal Dreaming)	Bindarriy et al,1991
<b>Spontaneous learning</b> (as opposed to structured)	Andrews & Hughes, 1988
<b>Focus on skills for specific tasks</b> (rather than on general principles)	Harris, 1980
<b>Secondary Cultural Differences (those that arise from students' experiences with school, or with the majority society)</b> Ogbu, 1988	
<b>Apparent passive participation</b> (likely resulting from not wanting to be seen as pushy, not learning at home to initiate and manipulate, differences in language usage)	Christie, 1982; Hughes, 1992; Bindarriy et al, 1991; Kearins, 1982
<b>Concrete learning style</b> (likely resulting from lack of relevance of how and what is taught)	Hughes & More, 1997; Craven, 1999; Harrison, 2008; Yunkaporta, 2009
<b>Reflective and Random learning styles</b> (likely resulting from unfamiliar environment of school and feelings of ostracization; fear of being shamed and ridiculed)	Malin, 1990

Table 3: Learning styles of Australian Aboriginal students: Hughes & More (1987) and other research

Hughes and More (1997), caution that the preferred way of learning for many students is not always their strongest way of learning. They also found that students from a cultural minority (including Aboriginal students) usually use a way of learning which is not their strongest way of learning especially when the teaching style delivered by the school is different from their learning style. (p. 24)

Some scholars (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Gilliland, 1997; Grant & Gillespie, 1993) suggest the use of visual arts across the curriculum to create a visual learning environment to engage and maximize learning of Indigenous students. They suggest designing activities and tasks that allow students to both observe and engage in hands-on ways using drawing materials.

The *Deadly Ways to Learn Project* (Education Department of Western Australia et al, 2000) states “Two-way teaching is characterized by the incorporation of more ‘Aboriginal way’ pedagogy (including more negotiation, collaborative group work, problem solving, integration and hands-on activities) and reduced use of controlled ‘look, listen, do’ ways of teaching” (p.10), which tend to dominate many Western pedagogies.

Cleary & Peacock, 1998, and Hall, 1996, suggest integrating experiential learning, service learning, and field trips as ways of connecting learning more explicitly to the everyday lives of students. For example, when learning about money, visit a shop; when learning about banks and financial institutions, visit a bank; when learning about building roads and transport systems or mining, visit an active road plant or a working mine. These shared experiences provide additional ‘situations’ from which to build scaffolding from what students know to what else they need to know. This is essential since it is not always possible to find something in the home lives of children that can serve as the foundation of the ‘bridge’ on which to build new knowledge.

Cleary & Peacock, 1998, also suggest that teachers tap into the human need for self determination as this empowers students and results in more meaningful and social responsibility. This requires teachers to ‘negotiate’ what will be learned and how it will be learned, and how learning will be demonstrated.

Values and behaviours in traditional cultures can sometime point to pedagogical styles that should be used to maximize learning. For example, values of cooperation, sharing and harmony can point to cooperative learning. Taylor et al (1991) found that using cooperative learning pedagogies with American Native students appeared to improve student achievement and attitudes. [A word of caution is needed however, since some relationships between genders, families and individuals may not be acceptable in cultural contexts; teachers should check with Indigenous Teacher Aides or families before insisting that certain students work – or even sit together.]

**Questioning and timing** is another area in pedagogy that has focused attention in the teaching and learning of Indigenous students. Gilliland, 1995, Rhodes, 1994 and others for example, suggest that teachers use longer ‘wait time’ when asking questions since studies have shown that many Indigenous students are taught to wait until they feel confident enough to respond. Similarly, Perso (2003) suggests that notions of ‘five minutes to go’ may be totally foreign to students who are likely to engage at their own pace and continue until they have finished what they are doing.

Traditional Western pedagogical strategies largely include question and answer sessions where teachers use inquiry to determine what students know and don’t know; questioning is used as assessment for learning, to inform the direction and nature of the instruction.

Research by Moses & Yallop (2008) indicates that Aboriginal children appear to be well prepared for the question and answer routine of the classroom. That is, they are used to being asked a variety of questions by adults, understand *why* questions, and know that questions expect a reply. However, they also found that these same children can be confused by the questioning routine in school and are reluctant to answer questions asked by their teachers or to ask any themselves.

They attribute this reluctance to the children a) finding the Standard Australian English spoken by their teachers incomprehensible, and b) being singled out in front of their peers as potentially exposing them to 'shame'.

Hanlen (2010), citing earlier research by Eades (1995) explained that "questions beginning with 'where', 'how', 'when', 'does', 'is' etc are considered very confronting in terms of protocols and instead questions are usually formed as statements followed by the tag 'eh'". She continues "If teachers use direct questions Aboriginal students may respond in ways that the teachers may misinterpret as they interpret the student's responses through Anglo-Australian linguistic and cultural responses. If a teacher asks a student, "Do you play sport on the weekend?" the student may answer 'yes' even when they may not. The student may not be saying 'yes', meaning I agree with you, but it could mean 'yes, see how I am being obliging, friendly and cooperative'. This is NOT a lie, but could rather be a cultural protocol." (p.5)

Gribble (2002) maintains that "Teachers who are unable to change their practice to meet Aboriginal children's learning style usually push their students into patterns of failure and reluctance to attend schools." (p.67)

Some key differences of which teachers need to be aware have been presented by Yunkaporta (2009, p. 56) who describes how to operate at the 'cultural interface of mainstream curricula and local Indigenous knowledge'. This theory describes the synergy between Indigenous and Western teaching and learning approaches, incorporating scaffolding of knowledge and situated learning. His '8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning Framework' describes these synergies, showing how contemporary and shared local knowledges can result from traditional local knowledges dynamically interfacing (blending) with non-local knowledges. In particular, the suggested pedagogies draw on the different ways of approaching and structuring knowledge that Aboriginal cultures have, for example, non-linear pedagogy that requires teachers to re-visit concepts in order to deepen understanding,

### ***High expectations***

The explicit reference to the need for teacher high expectations for Indigenous children in the Melbourne Declaration (MCEEDYA, 2008) acknowledges the importance of this in pedagogy as identified by research.

Haberman (1991) claims that teachers of minority and disadvantaged students lower their learning expectations for these students and use a pedagogy that revolves around providing information, giving directions, setting assignments and tests.

In other words, they 'dumb down' the curriculum by not expecting critical and higher-order thinking from their students, making all the decisions for them. Similarly, Dent & Hatton (1996) found that teachers of students from different backgrounds than their own adopted a non-academic strategy in their teaching that did not require them to exert much energy; students were given 'busy work' – a diet of colouring in, completing worksheets, watching videos and other activities that presented little or no challenge. These findings were supported by those of Lingard & Ladwig (2001).

Sleeter (1993) found that although the teachers she worked with voiced commitment to promoting high achievement among students of colour, there was no agreement about what should constitute 'high achievement'. One teacher, when asked why achievement by students of colour was lower, responded with: "Of course it is lower– what else would you expect?" (p.164) Others, when asked to define exactly what would constitute high achievement, responded with what Sleeter called 'avoidance behaviour'.

For example, they explained that *success is different for different children*, or that *measures used are inappropriate and therefore don't count*, or that *definitions of achievement don't count because any achievements are undone by families or other teachers*. Sleeter found that few white teachers in her study argued that (students of colour) can and should be attaining the same levels of achievement as white students. She validated this with research by Anyon, 1981; Fine, 1991; and Grant & Sleeter, 1986.

Chris Sarra, leader of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute in Australia, argues that educators need to understand the dynamic that underpins the failure of many Aboriginal students in Australia. He believes that many teachers blame children and the complexities of their communities for low attendance and low achievement. He holds the position that the main problem that needs to be confronted if current under-achievement patterns are to be turned around is the culture of low expectations by teachers (Sarra, 2007).

Yunkaporta & McGinty (2009) revealed that the teachers in their study believed there to be 'unspoken mandates' of cultural exclusion and low expectations in their school, despite administration support for Aboriginal perspectives and engagement. However, there was no evidence of these messages being explicitly stated or written. The teachers who participated in their study believed that the low expectations for Aboriginal students were "...communicated informally through the curriculum, the school design and the organizational structure." (p.70). It is likely that this culture of low expectations that permeated the school rose from the teachers' own perception, a product of their own cultural world view, (see Section 5.1.6). This 'informal curriculum' may also have arisen from a perceived (or mandated) requirement to 'get through the course/curriculum' in which case issues of time impact strongly on lesson planning and the use of pedagogies described in Yunkaporta's research (2009).

Summaries offered regarding effective pedagogy and teacher strategies include those by Cleary & Peacock (1998), Swisher and Deyhle (1989), and Perso (2003), and include the following:

- making personal connections with students and building strong relationships, including with families and community
- establishing cultural relevance and meaning in the curriculum
- using highly engaging activity-based learning and cooperative learning some of the time
- being flexible, fair and consistent
- providing real audience and purpose for student work
- providing immediate feedback and give praise when it is due
- allowing for students to 'save face' so they are not shamed by having to perform or singling them out in front of their peers, and
- using humour and laughing at yourself when you make a mistake; showing students it's OK to make a mistake or get it wrong.

### ***English as Second or Foreign Language Learners (ESL/EFL)***

For students from diverse cultural backgrounds for whom English is not their first language who are learning in classrooms where English is the language of instruction, the use of technical terms can be confusing if they are not specifically and explicitly taught along with

their contextual meaning. Teachers need to know for example, that some words can mean one thing in one subject area and another in another subject area.

For example, the word 'bigger' can refer to physical size in the Arts whereas in Mathematics it generally refers to numerical value. This is often the same for technical words in some subjects that have more general meanings outside of the function. For example, the word *function* defines a purpose in a general sense, of an object, whereas in mathematics it is an algebraic relationship between variables.

Perso (2011) describes some pedagogies that teachers might use when teaching students who are ESL/EFL learners:

“Scaffolding English language for a class by teaching it as a *foreign* language will include:

- Teaching new vocabulary each and every day, and supporting new words with visual drawings and pictures placed around the room and school; (progress can be shown by developing a graph for the wall, indicating the number of new words and phrases learned each day/week by each student. This also serves to raise self esteem and confidence).
- Acknowledging the linguistic strength-base of students: ‘Talking up’ the unique ability to speak many languages, showing awe and even envy.
- Including substantial repetition of phrases and words so that students can become familiar with them (in particular, verb phrases like “I am .....”, “I’m going to .....”, “I have.....” where students can insert different new words to change the meaning). This is how foreign languages are taught.
- Using relevant, meaningful and interesting contexts that include the students themselves and/or people they know, whenever possible.
- Learning some of the students’ home language/s so that letter-sound (phonic) knowledge can be scaffolded from students’ home language/s (especially if they come from an oral tradition). This will also help students to understand that you value their home language/s. Aboriginal English words can also be used for this purpose (see Section 3.3.3).
- Using the *same* big books and DVDs repetitively so that students can learn new words, repeating phrases with confidence, knowing what to expect and ‘read’ body language, illustrations and behaviours that may go with the new language.
- Using repetition in programs and routines so that students know what to expect in the school environment each day and feel safe.”

*Source: Perso (2011)*

In a recent communication with the author, a teacher of Indigenous students in a remote school learning Standard Australian English as a foreign language, indicated that he demonstrates unique cultural competence through having students in his class collectively recite the same English language passage repetitively over time to “enable improved enunciation without ‘correcting’ the legitimate accent borne of first language interference” (Graham, 2012). Undertaking the exercise collectively avoids student shame and builds confidence and acceptance of the accent as legitimate by the teacher shows sensitivity to the students.

Tripcony (2007) provides a word of caution regarding speakers of Aboriginal English. She points out that while it may be obvious to teachers in remote locations that students speak traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as their first language and that consequently they need to use second language teaching techniques for English literacy acquisition, it is generally not so obvious that students speaking Aboriginal English need the same type of instruction.

Tripcony cites research (p.8) that reveals many non-Indigenous teachers do not recognize Aboriginal English as a 'home language', believing that their students are just speaking English badly. These students need to be taught Standard Australian English as a second or foreign language in the same way as students who are speaking a foreign language such as French, Spanish, and Arrente.

**Multicultural education theory/ teacher knowledge**

Gay (2000) suggests that the third essential component of the knowledge base for culturally responsive teachers is an understanding of multicultural education theory, research and scholarship. She claims that this needs to be located and woven into teacher preparation programs. The challenge, once teachers have this knowledge, is to convert it into culturally responsive curriculum design and strategies.

In another case study, Klump and McNeir (2005) emphasise "...the importance of teacher knowledge and sustained teacher training if schools hope to provide culturally responsive schooling to Indigenous youth.....tribal elders teach school faculty important aspects of the local culture and language; the goal is to improve the cultural competency of teachers over the course of a number of days so that they retain the knowledge and implement it in their classrooms." They continue "...the knowledge, norms, values, resources and epistemologies of local communities must be viewed as legitimate and valuable and intimately integrated into schools.", "...examples of schooling for self-determination; the engagement of the students in this way also facilitates the learning of their local community knowledge, culture and epistemology"...."these examples also point to the weakness in offering one-size-fits-all curriculum ". (p.18)

Although curriculum and pedagogy are presented in separate sections above, as previously indicated they are not in reality, separate. Effective teaching and learning integrates the knowledges, curricula and pedagogies in order to produce culturally responsive teaching.

**Teaching styles**

Most of the above discussion focuses on the pedagogies that teachers need to use from a non-Indigenous teacher's perspective, that is, in learning from the needs of the Indigenous students. It is interesting to contemplate the (natural/intuitive) pedagogical response made by Indigenous teachers when teaching Indigenous students. The following table presents results made by observing patterns in pedagogy observed by American Indian and non-Indian Teachers:

<b>American Indian Teachers</b>	<b>Non-Indian Teachers</b>
Slow pace	Fast pace
Economy of words	Many words used
Asks questions directed to all	Calls on students directly
Wait time for responses ≈ 3 minutes	Wait time for responses ≈ 0.5 seconds
Moves on if answers are correct	Tells students if answers are right or wrong
Responds to students' nonverbal requests for assistance	Responds to students' verbal requests for assistance
Uses few directives	Uses many directives
Does not use names with directives	Uses names of individuals with directives

Works quietly; more private time with individuals	Works 'publicly'; not as much private time with individuals
Commands are indirect	Commands are direct
Shared control of social interactions	Teacher controls social interactions

Table 4: Patterns observed in Teacher Pedagogy (In Klug & Whitfield, 2003, from Erikson & Mohatt, 1982)

Much can be learned by analyzing these observations. The *natural* response by the American Indian teachers reflects community and cultural values. In particular, as well as being less confronting and direct, the American Indian teachers seem to place less emphasis on the speed in which teaching is delivered. More time is provided for the students to reflect on their learning. Teachers seem to be constantly under pressure to 'get through the course', often at the expense of student learning. This way of operating and curriculum delivery reflects the (Western) value 'time is money' which may become part of the classroom experience, reflected in terms used by teachers such as 'five minutes to go' (Perso, 2003, p.98).

### ***In summary***

By way of summarizing the above discussion, Klump & McNeir (2005) present the following *Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy* based on a successful program for Native Hawaiian students by Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal & Tharp (2003):

1. Teachers and students working together
2. Developing language and literacy skills across the curriculum
3. Connecting lessons to student's lives
4. Engaging students in challenging lessons
5. Emphasising dialogue over lectures.

There is a positive and significant relationship between teachers' use of these standards and student performance (Klump & McNeir, 2005). This is validated by DuFour, et al (2004), Chenowith (2009), Elmore, (2000), and Timperley et al, (2007).

In addition, Hanley and Noblit (2009), having made a study of 36 research studies that examined the connections among culturally responsive educational approaches, racial identity, resilience and achievement, presented nine themes for culturally responsive pedagogy that promote these outcomes, as follows:

1. Use culture to promote racial identity; the program should include key aspects of the home culture of students.
2. Use culture and racial identity as an asset; design programs so the students' culture is a strength to be deployed in learning.
3. Educate about racism and racial uplift; programs should provide accurate information about racial oppression and racism as they promote strategies using racial identity to encourage high achievement and resilience in the face of racial oppression.
4. Employ the arts; arts programs that engage students' culture and racial identity will likely result in the learning of a wide range of competencies.
5. Develop caring relationships; be aware that students interpret what is a caring relationship from their own culture, not that of the person offering a caring relationship.
6. Assume success; programs should recognize the wealth of culture and experience that every student brings and are geared to build on academic, cultural and racial strengths.

7. Promote active learning, problem-based instruction and student involvement applied to real world situations where student decision-making and critical thinking are required; high expectations should be the rule for educators, parents and students.
8. Involve the community in active participation; this requires that educators have a good understanding of the culture/s and continue to learn about them as they are evolving from families and children, using inquiry skills and good listening skills.
9. Acknowledge the challenges; educators may need to make a paradigm shift from a mindset that views cultural difference as the problem. Making this shift can be challenging and difficult, requiring courage and tenacity, but is rewarding.

In their study with Aboriginal students in Western New South Wales, Yunkaporta & McGinty (2009) identified six Quality Teaching Pedagogies that stood out most: Self-direction, Self-regulation, Social support, Connectedness to the world, Narrative, and Cultural knowledge. They also found that by using these six, other elements of quality teaching (i.e. deep knowledge, problematic knowledge, higher-order thinking, student background knowledge, substantive communication and knowledge integration) were covered. Because Yunkaporta has kinship ties in the far north of Australia and ancestral ties in the far south of Australia, he believes that methodologies used in the research had to work 'in the middle ground between different Aboriginal nations'(Yunkaporta, 2009b, p.1).

### **5.1.5 Assessment**

Assessment of learning should be continuous in a classroom. Assessment that is on-going (formative) provides more information about students and their achievement than summative assessment i.e. that which occurs at the end of an instruction period such as a term or semester and usually to inform a grade. Gribble (2002) highlighted that the biggest concern for teachers in her study in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, was how to measure student progress in ways that provide positive reinforcement to students while at the same time providing accountability for their own work.

Perso (2011) separated the assessment and measurement of achievement from reporting it (i.e. see Figure 3). In particular, she recognized the importance for both students and teachers in knowing that the students had progressed in their learning and therefore showing the 'distance travelled' can be positively reinforcing for both students and teachers. She states:

"Showing progress in the classroom in an on-going way is essential for students for whom benchmarks and targets might be too wide to indicate progress through in a single reporting period. EALD outcomes and the expectations are both probably in this category for many EALD students. Teachers must be able to show progress of students in the classroom on a monthly or weekly basis. They can do this using graphs and tables that enable children to see their own progress. For example, graphs on the classroom wall showing the size of student's vocabulary or number of sight words, spelling marks, number of English words learned and/or used in writing, number of sentences written in a narrative, number of counting words, number facts, multiplication tables and so on all provide data for graphs and charts. Students can improve their numeracy by keeping them up to date themselves and can take some responsibility for their own learning by setting individual targets. Student attendance graphs should be placed alongside so that students can see the relationship themselves between amount of schooling attended and their own personal learning". (p. 46)

Standardized testing is often used at system, organization or national level in order to facilitate efficiency and minimize costs in gaining wide-spread information about student achievement. However, this type of assessment can privilege select groups of students whilst marginalizing or segregating others (Weinstein et al, 2004). This is largely due to the fact that these tests require literacy in the dominant language and consequently are culturally and linguistically biased in spite of the best efforts of writers to ensure otherwise.

Dockett et al (2010), in describing what *doesn't* work with respect to school readiness aimed at closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learning outcomes, state "Assessment of Indigenous children through tests based in non-Indigenous culture can reinforce 'gaps' in knowledge and skills, rather than building positive images of Indigenous children as learners." (p.1)

Rhodes (1994) working with Indigenous students in the U.S. cites issues of translation, decision-making processes, and rules around teachers offering students support, as three possible factors affecting Native students' performance on standardized tests. He explains that the genre of most standardized tests requires students to answer quickly, guess, and take risks, skills which many students raised in traditional communities do not have, having been raised to make decisions slowly and accurately. He also notes that in tribal communities the norm is to help those in need and work collectively rather than individually. Similarly, Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber (2001) argue that 'cultural validity' (i.e. referring to the ways that individuals from different cultures are predisposed to respond to questions and to solve problems) should be a key component in assessment design and implementation.

Further to this, not only do the written questions effectively 'lock out' students from engaging with them on the basis of language used, question *contexts* can act as a barrier for students who are unfamiliar with them. For example, a numeracy question situated in a *garden centre* about fractional quantities of *potting mix* administered to students who are likely to have never heard of either of these concepts, neither allows entry nor engagement for second language learners from remote parts of the country let alone enables them to deal with the mathematics involved. Such questions are discriminatory as they are unfair. (Jorgensen & Perso, 2012)

However, because society increasingly places higher stakes on national test scores as an indication of achievement, it is important that students are taught how to take these tests and to learn the test genre so that their disadvantage is minimized, particularly in terms of job opportunities or higher education. There is a risk that this 'practice' might become the major focus in classrooms and consequently narrow the curriculum. Teachers need to ensure that there is a balance between test preparation and authentic assessment.

In the same way that teachers use a range of pedagogical strategies in their enactment of the curriculum to accommodate students' different learning styles, they should also use a range of assessment strategies to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to demonstrate the full extent of their learning. This does not mean that *each* assessment piece should do this, but rather that a *suite* of assessment tasks undertaken across a term, semester or reporting period should be *comprehensive* of the range of assessment types.

The *suite* of assessment tasks should also include opportunities for students to demonstrate higher-order thinking, depth of understanding, and ability to apply their knowledge and skills in a range of contexts.

Perso (2011) draws on the principles of quality assessment in providing a comprehensive statement about assessing learning for Indigenous students, as follows:

"Assessment tasks should be designed in ways that specifically support all learners to demonstrate their learning. In particular, for learners from diverse cultural backgrounds and/or who do not have English as their main language, these include:

- drawing on bilingual sources and texts (when available)
- enabling visual, kinaesthetic demonstrations rather than verbal responses
- allowing students to rehearse and work in a group.

“In addition, assessment tasks might be designed which:

- can be related to their cultural backgrounds of students e.g. using contexts that are familiar and relevant
- are not Anglo/Australian culturally over-loaded e.g. containing colloquial Australian terms and phrases
- are organized and written with consideration to the needs of EALD learners

“Assessment should also include special considerations or accommodations when required, reflecting the same level of support and scaffolding afforded students during instruction. Valid assessment (a principle of quality assessment) demands that assessment tasks do in fact assess the intended learning and not the language demands of the task. Special considerations might include provision of:

- additional time to complete assignments
- additional time to read, translate and formulate responses to test questions
- assessment instructions that have been adapted in all listening/viewing assessment activities, including repetition of instructions, opportunity to preview listening/viewing question forms, multiple opportunities to hear/view a text
- bilingual dictionaries (if they exist) for use during an assessment task
- special vocabulary lists
- reader and scribe, bilingual teachers/aides/volunteers
- lap top computers
- assistive technologies. “ (p.36)

Implementation of these arrangements requires a whole-school assessment policy to ensure consistency across the school. Involvement of parents and community in these decisions should occur.

### **5.1.6 What knowledge, attitudes and skills do teachers need in order to teach in culturally responsive ways?**

We have discussed the pedagogical skills needed by teachers to be culturally responsive. These skills result from the cultural competence of teachers but clearly, a certain amount of knowledge is essential in order to elicit the response. Much of this is described above. However, by way of a summary the following is offered.

From the previous section it is clear that teachers need to *know* their students and *know about* their students. In addition they need to have

1. Knowledge about various cultural groups (Dana, Behn, & Gonwa, 1992; Manoleas, 1994; Mason et al., 1996; Matthews, 1996; Pierce & Pierce, 1996; Ronnau, 1994; Sowers-Hoag & Sandau-Beckler, 1996).
2. Knowledge that diversity exists *within* ethnic or cultural groups (Mason et al., 1996).
3. Knowledge about historical or contemporary relationships that may have caused or that cause distrust between minority groups and the dominant society (Mason et al., 1996) and the legacies of those in the past (Manoleas, 1994).
4. Power relationships between teacher and student (Pinderhughes, 1997; Nicolls et al, 1998).

That teachers need to demonstrate cultural competence in all areas of their professional practice is articulated in the Australian *National Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2011). Cultural responsiveness should be embedded into each of the seven standards:

1. Knowing students and how they learn
2. Knowing the content and how to teach it
3. Planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning
4. Creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments
5. Assessing, and providing feedback and reporting on student learning
6. Engaging in professional learning
7. Engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/caregivers and the community.

Each of the cultural responses previously discussed can be aligned to at least one of the above standards as follows:

<b>National Professional Standards for Teachers</b>	<b>Consideration in Cultural Responsiveness</b>
1. Knowing students and how they learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know the learning strengths and preferred learning styles of each student</li> <li>• Know what the students already know and bring with them into the learning environment</li> <li>• Know the students' interests and home lives in order to ensure the learning is relevant and interesting</li> <li>• Know child rearing strategies, cultural identity and linguistic background of each student</li> <li>• Know what teaching strategies and activities will support the full participation and learning of all students</li> </ul>
2. Knowing the content and how to teach it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Situate' the intended learning content in students' lives</li> <li>• Know what the students already know and bring with them into the learning environment and how that might connect with what they need to learn</li> <li>• 'Bridge' the intended learning content from what students know and individual starting points, using an organized teaching sequence</li> <li>• Know the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective/s on the content to be taught by learning the histories, cultures and language backgrounds of the students</li> </ul>
3. Planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set learning goals that are achievable challenges and have high expectations for their achievement by each and every student</li> <li>• Plan teaching sequences by 'breaking down the content 'and 'building it back up' in achievable steps through realistic scaffolding</li> <li>• Know and understand the communication styles (including non-verbal) of students and use them to support student learning</li> <li>• Use feedback from students and parents, and student achievement data to inform planning and learning sequences</li> <li>• Engage parents/families/carers/Elders in the educative process</li> </ul>
4. Creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support student participation by establishing and implementing inclusive and positive interactions that engage all students</li> <li>• Establish and maintain orderly and workable routines so all students know what to expect and 'know the rules' and expectations of the school and teacher</li> <li>• Manage challenging behaviour by establishing and negotiating clear expectations with students and parents</li> <li>• Ensure expected behaviours are culturally inclusive, shared, and made explicit</li> <li>• Ensure students feel physically, emotionally and culturally safe and welcomed into the learning environment</li> </ul>
5. Assessing, and providing feedback and reporting on student learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that assessment forms are negotiated with students and their families so that they are truly able to demonstrate the desired learning</li> <li>• Ensure that ability to demonstrate learning is not limited by language control</li> <li>• Provide timely , effective and appropriate feedback to students relevant to their learning goals; ensure progress is demonstrated even if goals aren't achieved in full</li> <li>• Analyze student achievement data, reflect on practice and identify interventions and modifications to teaching practice as needed</li> <li>• Use appropriate reporting formats and/or interpretive services as needed to report student progress to parents</li> </ul>
6. Engaging in professional learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek to learn about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students from their families and communities, and from colleagues</li> <li>• Immerse yourself in the community and language if possible and to the degree that this is permitted</li> <li>• Contribute to positive collegial discussions about students and how they learn</li> <li>• Reflect on your own cultural knowledge and beliefs, adjusting these as needed in order to empathize with students in on-going ways</li> </ul>
7. Engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/caregivers and the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and maintain respectful collaborative relationships with parents/families/communities regarding their children's learning and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds</li> <li>• Participate in professional and community networks and forums to broaden knowledge and improve practice</li> </ul>

Table 5: Alignment between National Professional Standards for Teachers and Cultural Responsiveness

Castango & Brayboy (2008) draw attention to the importance of teacher attitudes and values in culturally responsive teaching. Pewewardy & Hammer (2003) note that “Culturally Responsive Teaching relies on the development of certain dispositions towards learners.” (p.1.) In addition, Yazzie (1999) maintains that “Affective qualities, rather than skills or academic preparation, seem to characterize effective teachers in the research literature. Studies indicate that teachers who serve Native students effectively are informal, are caring and warm, give up authority, and have and show respect for their students.”(p.95)

Other scholars (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Rhodes, 1994) note the importance of teacher dispositions when teaching students of colour, including temperament, flexibility, and overall disposition. In addition, Kleinfeld, 1979, Shwisher & Deyhle, 1989, and Vogt & Au, 1995, refer to “an attitude and presence that expects high performance levels while caring about and understanding Indigenous youth” – a “warm demander” (in Castango and Brayboy, p.970).

The world view of teachers concerning their Indigenous students impacts on and creates attitudes, beliefs and perceptions held by these teachers which in turn are reflected in their service provision. Decisions about what to teach, how to teach it, how or whether to assess it, and so on are affected by these worldviews. Agbo, 2001, Klug & Whitfield, 2003, and Tipperconnic, 2000 all argue that if white teachers do not acquire the knowledge and skills needed to integrate and reinforce local community cultural norms in the classroom, then the impact of their teaching – regardless of cultural responsiveness – will be minimal.

Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009) relate findings from research undertaken in a remote Indigenous Community at a school in Western New South Wales with a very high Aboriginal student population. They were asked to work in the school to introduce Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum in order to address low levels of literacy, attendance and engagement of Aboriginal students. The researchers describe how the original focus of the research moved from being student focused to teacher focused when they discovered that the teachers had entrenched beliefs about the intellectual deficit in the Aboriginal community. These were revealed in comments such as “they have no logic” and “their lack of logic.....”.

These beliefs were accompanied by resentments exhibited in comments such as “...everything handed to them on a platter”, “...are bowing to their every needs.” (p.63) These beliefs and perceptions resulted in teachers becoming lazy, lowering learning expectations and standards, and cutting off emotionally. They also impacted on the learning content presented by teachers who felt uncomfortable including Aboriginal perspectives and a reluctance to use Aboriginal support teachers as sources of knowledge due to their low expectations of them.

Aspects of cultural knowledge needed by teachers, as suggested by scholars in the US, include knowledge of:

- Spiritual traditions
- Past and present issues facing tribal groups
- Characteristics of local culture
- Broad and specific tribal histories
- Common manifestations and impacts of racism among Indigenous peoples
- Differences between and within tribal nations
- Issues surrounding language preservation, the history of Indigenous educational policies and practices, and
- The history and continuation of colonization.

(Gilliland, 1995; King, Hollins & Hayman, 1994; Jacobs & Reyhner, 2002; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Pai, 1990; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003; Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989).

In addition, Castagno & Brayboy (2008) note other, possibly more important knowledge that teachers need although they found a gap with respect to this in the literature; "...teachers must learn and know about the unique government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the federal government, the federal government's trust responsibility to Indigenous communities, the legal-political status of Native peoples in the United States, and the importance of self-determination within tribal communities . This knowledge is almost never included in teacher preparation, and yet it provides the foundation for Indigenous education in America." (p.973)

### **5.1.7 What are the characteristics of culturally responsive teachers?**

Villegas and Lucas (2002) use six characteristics to describe culturally responsive teachers: They:

1. are socio-culturally conscious
2. have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds
3. see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable
4. understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction
5. know about the lives of their students, and
6. design instruction that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar.

These characteristics, according to the definitions in Section 4.4, broadly describe the cultural competence of teachers, that is they describe the *teachers* rather than what they *do*. They are evident in the following description by Gribble (2002) as she describes the 'most successful teachers' she encountered in schools in the Kimberley region of Western Australia:

"The most successful teachers in schools were those who believed that being a teacher was central to their sense of self and was their path in life. These teachers were exemplary in their preparation and planning for teaching spending considerable time, even extensive amounts of personal time, to plan and prepare for their teaching. Teachers who were successful in their classrooms engendered a positive classroom climate in their classrooms even though they required extra time to manage and monitor those students who had difficulty in completing their work, working independently, and meeting classroom rules. Very high expectations were set for students in meeting classroom rules, attendance, punctuality cleanliness and tidiness, and competing homework set.

Lesson content taught in classrooms was interesting, encouraged students to learn and use 'white' thinking skills, was based on students' background knowledge and cultural experiences, and was integrated and thematic across or within subjects. The teaching of language was used to particularly focus much of the students' learning. When teachers relied on Aboriginal students' well-developed sense of autonomy, used a discipline style that did not bring shame upon students, and allowed students to exhibit their individualism and flamboyant sense of personal style, then classrooms were harmonious places for learning. Not only did teachers have to support students' self-identity, they needed to develop students' self-efficacy about success at school. When teachers focused on student-centred learning and they constantly modeled and repeatedly demonstrated and consolidated, over long periods of time, what needed to be learned, especially in a range of language skills and competencies, the greater the progress students made in their learning.

“Teachers had to balance teaching and learning strategies between students sitting, watching, listening, and copying with making an effort, asking questions, and doing things even though mistakes might be made. This indeed demanded that successful teachers in the Kimberley schools were extraordinary adults.”

She continued “One aspect was clear in the classrooms. Teachers could not revert to survival teaching strategies using ‘busy work’ activities. Students would simply not turn up to schools, even though videos and computers as gap-fillers had some appeal for some of the time. In the end, if school was not interesting students found more exciting things to do at home or away from school”. (p.290)

Lee et al (2007) list seven *Common Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Practices* of teachers, their cultural responsiveness, based on their comprehensive review of the literature, including the work of Klump & McNeir (2005) and Yunkaporta (2009) as follows:

1. A climate of caring, respect, and the valuing of students’ cultures is fostered in the school and classroom  
(*Fanshawe, 1976, 1989; Cooper, 2002; Gay, 2000; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tharp, 1982; Waxman & Tellez, 2002; Collins, 1993; Green, 1982, O’Keefe, 1989*)
2. Bridges are built between academic learning and students’ prior understanding, knowledge, native language, and values  
(*Fanshawe, 1976, 1989; Collins, 1993; Green, 1982, O’Keefe, 1989; Conrad, et al, 2004; Doherty et al, 2003; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Waxman & Tellez, 2002*)
3. Educators all learn from and about their students’ culture, language, and learning styles to make instruction more meaningful and relevant to their students’ lives  
(*Apthorp et al, 2003; Lee, 2003; Lipka, 2002*)
4. Local knowledge, language, and culture are fully integrated into the curriculum, not added on to it  
(*Demmert, 2001; Hollins, 1996*)
5. Staff members hold students to high expectations and have high expectations for all students  
(*Cooper, 2002; Hill et al, 2003; Waxman & Tellez, 2002; Fanshawe, 1976, 1989; Collins, 1993; Green, 1982; Yunkaporta, 2009; O’Keefe, 1989*)
6. Effective classroom practices are challenging, cooperative, and hands on, with less emphasis on rote memorization and lecture formats  
(*Hill et al, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Yunkaporta, 2009; St. Charles & Costantino, 2000*)
7. School staff build trust and partnerships with families, especially with families marginalized by schools in the past  
(*Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Cooper, 2002; Demmert, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sosa, 1997; Trumbull et al 2001; Young, 1998*).

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1998) developed standards for educators, noting Culturally Responsive Educators:

- Incorporate local ways of knowing and teaching in their work
- Use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of their students
- Participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way
- Work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school
- Recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential.

Alaskan Native Knowledge Network, 1998

In addition, The Flamboyan Foundation in collaboration with the Harvard Family Research Project (2011) articulates the activities of a teacher demonstrating effective family engagement practices, adding that to be culturally competent in this regard teachers need to undertake these activities with sensitivity and using culturally respectful ways with respect to relationships and communications with families; the teacher:

- Interacts orally and in written form, respectfully and pleasantly
- Knows the names of families
- Ensures families receive positive, consistent information and affirmation on the importance of their engagement
- Ensures families receive regular, personal invitations to visit the classroom and engage in their child's education
- Provides weekly, individualized communication about the child to families that is positive, actionable, and linked to student learning and progress towards goals
- Encourages families to contact him/her if they have a problem, question or concern and responds within twenty-four hours
- Has updated contact information for all students
- Provides information to families in a range of formats and differentiates communication for families with varying levels of literacy
- Provides face-to-face meetings conducted with families using a translator when needed wherever possible
- Has a personal conversation with families to learn about student's backgrounds, interests, strengths, and previous relationship/history with the school, as well as families' communication preferences and their hopes and dreams for their child. (The teacher uses this information to support his/her practice, including goal setting, lesson planning, assessment development, and homework)
- Asks families about their expectations for student success and communicates high expectations for each student
- Holds personal conversations with families to discuss what their short- and long-term goals for their students are, and modifies these goals over time to ensure they are rigorous and prepare students for (the pathways they need)
- Shows families what their children are learning and what they are supposed to be able to do, including explaining whether they are on track to be able to do for their grade level or not, and what they will do to help
- Ensures families can access weekly, personalized student performance and/or assessment data and uses this information to describe how their child is doing related to his/her personal goals and to the class average for that grade level
- Helps families to support the learning of their child at home by providing information and training in supporting learning and creating an environment conducive to learning; the teacher tailors this information to the child's specific needs.

*Flamboyan Foundation & Harvard Family Research Project, (2011)*

## 5.2 Culturally Responsive Schooling

The Collins Dictionary defines *schooling* as '*The process of being taught in a school*<sup>39</sup> whilst the American Heritage Dictionary describes *schooling* as '*Education obtained through experience or exposure*'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003

<sup>40</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement (COAG, 2009) established by the Council of Australia Governments to frame the task of Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage in Australia (see Section 2), recognizes 'schooling' as one of seven strategic platforms through which to direct major effort.

Elaboration of 'schooling' includes "Human capital development through education is key to future opportunity. Responsive schooling requires attention to infrastructure, workforce (including teacher and school leader supply and quality), curriculum, student literacy and numeracy achievement and opportunities for parental engagement and school/community partnerships." (p.6)

This elaboration seems to provide recognition of schooling in Australia as being an all-encompassing process provided by a school for students and experienced by the students. This process begins as soon as they enter the school, or even view the school from the outside, since, as they do so, they are being taught by what they see, feel, touch, and hear. For students from different cultural backgrounds than those of mainstream, even the buildings can be intimidating and leave children feeling inadequate and 'not belonging'. This can have major impacts on students, and particularly on their identity, self worth and self-esteem.

Brennan (1998) argues that "...schooling, for most Indigenous children and their parents, remains culturally alien. Most non-Indigenous teachers and students have little knowledge or understanding of Indigenous children's home lives and culture and this lack of understanding is reflected in their interactions with them". (p.159) The cultural 'jarring' that can occur on entering school for students from different cultural backgrounds than those of the mainstream school, has in the past been attributed to the characteristics and skills of the children themselves (Dockett et al, 2010; Snow, 2006).

The construct of 'school readiness' was for many years used to label students as 'ready' or 'not-ready' for school based on age, maturity, academic skills, psychological skills (e.g. self-regulation) and so on. More recent views (Leong & Bedrova, 2003) maintain that *school readiness* occurs during the first months of schooling. Dockett et al, (2010) concludes that these broader conceptions of readiness "recognise Interplay of children's individual characteristics and the contexts in which they live and have lived, as they grow and develop" (p.2). This has led to identification that school readiness is not only about the characteristics of the children, but about the characteristics of the school (i.e. the capacity and capability of the school to meet the needs of the children) and the supports, early educational experiences and environments provided by families and communities.

This construct of school readiness would appear to be useful at any phase of schooling and not merely in the early childhood phase. It also seems to be relevant regardless of how long students have attended school, in the context of culturally responsive schooling.

The research of Hattie (2009), Rowe (2003) and others demonstrates that whilst teachers make up the biggest difference to students learning, pedagogy and curriculum do not make up the entire schooling process. Other factors operate in the classroom, school and home/community that impact on student learning. These include school leadership, school policy, expectations and standards (as set by the community and education authority), and community involvement (including the home lives of students). It is important to consider how each of these interplay in the lives of students and the resulting feelings and experiences that might be evoked by individual students.

Terry Ngarritjan-Kessarlis (1995) illustrates the importance of culture and identity in her reflections on her schooling as an Aboriginal child attending an urban school in Darwin, Australia:

“Not once during my twelve years of formal schooling did any of my teachers or anyone else in the school system, affirm my Aboriginality. Instead I grew up feeling ashamed of my Aboriginal heritage and I felt pressured to stress that I was only ‘part Aboriginal’”. (p.1)

Through resources, interactions, discussion, behaviours and the environment, Terry learned that what was different was wrong: it was wrong to have a messy house, wrong to be raised by her mother *and* grandmother, wrong for her aunties and uncles to have responsibilities in her upbringing, wrong for older children to care for younger ones instead of mother, wrong not to rely on adults for everything, wrong not to wake up to an alarm clock, wrong not to have Weet-Bix for breakfast, and so on. Although Terry was never explicitly told these things she learned them through her environment and the people around her. For her, this was part of the *hidden* curriculum, where the processes and attitudes of teachers and students presented middle class western values as ‘right’ in all contexts, resulting in Aboriginal people being explicitly and implicitly disparaged. Terry viewed the problem as belonging to herself and her inadequate family, rather than to the schooling that was being provided to her.

Terry continues: “I felt uneasy..as if...someone would discover the discontinuity between the school Terry and the home Terry.... I now know that the home ways are more important. There are thousands of other Aboriginal families that do things the same way we do and live their lives like we do and it is right for them and it is right for us. It is wrong for us to feel that home ways are second best and that we must learn to do things ‘properly’ in order to succeed. School ways are important for school and career purposes but our home ways are absolutely essential for giving us our sense of who we are and we should be proud of them. Moreover, school should encourage us to be proud of home ways because the more secure we feel about ourselves, the more likely we are to achieve at school”. (p. 5)

Hampton (1988) developed criteria applicable not only to teachers in classrooms but to schools for what he called an ‘Indian theory of Education’. He argued that to be ‘authentically Native’ schooling needs to incorporate the following influences:

1. Spirituality – an appreciation of spiritual relationships;
2. Service – the purpose of education is to contribute to people;
3. Diversity – meeting the standards of diverse tribes and communities;
4. Culture – a people’s way of thinking, communicating, and living;
5. Tradition – continuity with tradition;
6. Respect – the relationship between the individual and the group recognized as mutual empowering;
7. History – appreciation of the facts of the Native American history, including the loss of the continent and continuing racial and political oppression;
8. Relentlessness – commitment to the struggle for good schools for Indian children;
9. Vitality – recognition of the strength of Indian people and culture;
10. Conflict – understanding the dynamics and consequences of oppression;
11. Place – the sense of place, land, territory; and
12. Transformation – commitment to personal and societal change.

Following this a decade later, The Alaskan Native Knowledge Network developed a set of *Cultural Standards for Schools* in 1998. Their represents standards that both schools and districts/regions should strive for to be culturally responsive:

A culturally responsive school:

1. Fosters the on-going participation of Elders in all aspects of the schooling process
2. Provides multiple avenues for students to access the learning that is offered, as well as multiple forms of assessment to demonstrate what they have learned
3. Provides opportunities for students to learn in and/or about their heritage language
4. Has a high level of involvement of professional staff who are of the same cultural background as the students with whom they are working

5. Consists of facilities that are compatible with the community environment in which they are situated
6. Fosters extensive on-going participation, communication and interaction between the school and community personnel. (Alaskan Native Knowledge Network, 1998).

Hanley (1999b), referring to the Cultural Competence continuum (see p. 17, this document) states

“... many schools fall into the class of cultural blindness. By intentionally adhering to the notion that cultural differences do not matter and that student bodies have not changed, many schools unintentionally hinder their students.

“These inadequate levels of cultural competence can be linked to several reasons. First, the discomfort of discussing issues of diversity is a major hindrance to students. For many teachers, cultural competency means recognizing their own shortcomings and biases in regards to ethnicity. As that Whites make up the majority of teaching staffs, the anxiety of revealing biases and discussing issues of race and diversity, can be a hindrance to cultural competency.” (p.9)

A broad base of research in the U.S. over the last two decades describes schools and districts that are successfully providing culturally responsive schooling (CRS) as having the following characteristics/elements:

- Strong and supportive administrator who shares the vision to make CRS a reality
- Administrator with long-term commitment to the community, high expectations for staff and students, ability to advocate for staff to try new things in a risk-free school environment (McCarty 1993, Rhodes, 1994)
- A core of mainly local school staff, consistent financial support, quality technical support (McCarty 1993)
- Safe school environment (Powers, 2006; Powers, Potthoff, Bearinger, Resnick, 2003)
- Schools and teachers are viewed as the ‘primary sites of change’ rather than the students (Jordan, 1995)
- Educators drawing on cross-disciplinary knowledge about students, culture, language and learning, as well as recognizing that smaller incremental changes may be more realistic (Jordan, 1995, Vogt & Au, 1995)
- Teachers have support including time, resources, tools to reflect on their own practice, conduct their own research within their own schools, and try new things with their students (Vogt & Au, 1995)
- Change that emanates from having the support of the local community (Begay, Dick, Estall & McCarty, 1995; McLaughlin, 1995; Vogt & Au, 1995)
- Re-evaluation of faculty and staff roles, status, and salaries so that hierarchies are minimized and locally specific cultures and languages are genuinely privileged (McLaughlin, 1995)
- Regular program monitoring, consistent funding, and the support of outside collaborators (Begay et al, 1995; Holm & Holm, 1995)
- Support and buy-in of parents and the local Indigenous community (can assist schools in providing valuable resources and support for culturally responsive educational efforts (Holm & Holm, 1995; McLaughlin, 1995; Vogt & Au, 1995; Ward, 1998).

The use of standards that can be used to hold schools accountable can be a powerful means to drive reform. Standards such as those of the Alaskan Native Knowledge Network (above) are designed to complement learning standards set by government. They provide the basis for professional whole-school discussions about whether the expected learning by students (as determined by government) is acceptable or not. If not, focus turns to the

standards that describe the conditions in which the learning takes place; in this case the cultural standards as set by the community.

Research in recent years (Marzano et al, 2005; Elmore, 2000; Bandura, 1995; DuFour, 2008; Timperley et al, 2007; Robinson, 2007; Chenoweth, 2009; Reeves, 2004; Leader, 2008; Boudett & Steele, 2007; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009; Day, et al 2009; Hughes, 2009; Burgess & Berwick, 2009), has focused on the impacts of Professional Learning Communities where a whole school approach around 'success for all' through building social capital, drives teaching and learning. For example, DuFour et al (2004) in their book "*Whatever it Takes*" and Chenoweth (2009) in her book "*How it's being done – Urgent lessons from unexpected schools*", describe how professional learning communities respond when students aren't learning what they should be learning, with amazing results. Interestingly, most of the schools in their research have large numbers of students come from low income backgrounds and, at the same time, ethnically diverse backgrounds.

In addition, Behrendt and McCausland (2008) determined that a culture of strong leadership and high-quality teachers in a school create an educational environment that students want to be part of. This has been demonstrated at a range of schools including Cherbourg State School in Queensland where the school staff worked closely with the community to develop a shared set of values and expectations for students at the school (Helme & Lamb, 2011).

Mulford (2011, p.1) in summarizing *what works* in teacher and school leaders quality and sustainability with respect to sustainable reform for closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes for students in Australia, writes that "Teachers and school leaders are most effective when they are:

- Contextually literate (understand the broader environment)
- Organizationally savvy (organize their schools to respond to that environment)
- Leadership smart (act with others, focus on areas where they can make a difference, make changes based on evidence, make sure all changes are heading in the same direction, use a range of leadership styles and develop leadership in others)."

Mulford continues "Failure to link all three of these elements can mean that initiatives are not implemented or, if implemented, do not meet the original intent". (2011, p. 2) He also cites a range of other negative consequences of this failure including feelings of confusion, overload, stress and low morale of school staff.

Gay (2000) states that 'Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it'.

This approach and that described by Mulford, (2011) is evident in the work of DuFour, (2004), Chenoweth, (2009) and others, indicating that when teachers and school leaders who individually and collectively demonstrate 'culturally responsive caring,' work together as a whole school community, student achievement can improve to amazing levels.

Gay continues "...culturally responsive caring...demonstrates high expectations and uses imaginative strategies to ensure academic success for ethnically diverse students. Teachers genuinely believe in the intellectual potential of these students and accept, unequivocally, their responsibility to facilitate its realization without ignoring, demeaning, or neglecting their ethnic and cultural identities. They build toward academic success from a basis of cultural validation and strength." (2002, p.110)

Sims (2011, p.11) states that "Cultural competency requires .... a willingness to engage with heart as well as mind". Kleinfeld (1975) in her research, found that teachers who used a warm style of teaching with their Indigenous students succeeded in challenging their intellectual abilities.

The following statement by Pewewardy et al (2003), although written for teaching and schooling in the U.S., summarizes well the above discussion: "...culturally responsive teaching cannot be approached as a recipe or series of steps that teachers can follow to be effective with American Indian and Alaska Native students. Instead it relies on the development of certain dispositions toward learners and a holistic approach to curriculum and instruction."

### **5.2.1 Organizational environment**

The school's organizational environment consists primarily of two dimensions, staffing and human resources (including leadership), and organizational and structural operations. Both of these dimensions need to be considered by any school desiring to be culturally responsive.

#### ***Human resources***

The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is central to culturally responsive schooling in Australia.

Education jurisdictions in Australia provide advice for schools in attending to this. This might include specific advice concerning employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, inclusion of Indigenous people in school planning, committees and so on, and provision of professional development for all teaching staff to participate in activities that develop greater understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education issues and perspectives.<sup>41</sup> It is important to also include some form of succession planning to ensure that Indigenous people in schools hold strategic positions, have a mentoring role so that their crucial role is adequately filled when they leave the school, and that culturally responsive programs are implemented. Seamless transitions in this role would seem to be paramount.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Training and Education institutions (e.g. Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Training and Education, Northern Territory) and regional Indigenous Training Coordinators train individuals within school priority areas which will ensure the school can access suitably qualified, credible and sustainable Aboriginal and Islander staff to support teaching and learning programs.

#### ***School environment***

The school environment includes the day-to-day organizational structures such as timetables, class sizes, resources, facilities, professional development and program flexibility and operations within the school. All these impact on cultural responsiveness in a school.

Some education systems in Australia<sup>42</sup> provide advice for schools in attending to good practices that support cultural responsiveness through the whole school environment include:

- ***Governance***: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members involved in meaningful school governance processes, and supported by the school to become and remain involved
- ***Communication***: Good communication between schools and Indigenous communities is the key to cultural responsiveness throughout the whole school environment. Schools might consider establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee or Council to assist in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within the curriculum and school programs. Schools can ensure that the Indigenous communities are aware of the school's programs and special events by posting newsletters and flyers with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

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<sup>41</sup> See for example at <http://www.aussieeducator.org.au/education/specificareas/indigenous.html>

<sup>42</sup> For example, Education Queensland (2009), Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (2010c)

organizations, and inviting Indigenous support staff to attend school staff meetings. A community notice-board within the school can also open up good communication between the community and school.

- *Open-door policy*: Maintaining an 'open-door policy' where parents and community members are welcomed to come to the school and be a part of the class and schooling environment enhances relationships with both Indigenous non-Indigenous communities. An open-door policy promotes unity within the whole school community.
- *Timetable flexibility*: Timetable constraints can often hinder the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives within the school environment. Flexibility is needed to enable timetables to align with local Aboriginal or Islander community events or the availability of cultural speakers. This facilitates staff to work more closely with Indigenous communities, and respects different perspectives and priorities.
- *Program flexibility*: Program flexibility offers non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff the freedom to adjust and redevelop work programs and support materials to ensure Indigenous perspectives are embedded within school practices. From an administrative perspective, auditing the intended curriculum to identify where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives might be included within current work programs is a good place to start. Cultural perspectives are complex and dynamic; curriculum should be flexible and responsive to community needs.
- *Resources*: Relevant and appropriate teaching materials are required. These must be identified in the resource allocation of school budgets. Local sources such as the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, the Institute of Aboriginal Development and the Strehlow Centre in the Northern Territory for example, have libraries and resource centres with a wide variety of artefacts, books, videos, DVDs, posters, computer programs, puzzles, dolls, games or magazines that are available for school use, and sometimes purchase.
- *Professional development*: Staff training (pre-service and in-service) is crucial to the school's ability to embed Indigenous perspectives. Cross-cultural training is a key element in the professional development of staff (more will be said on this in Section 5.3). This cannot be delivered as a 'one off' induction, but rather a continuous and ongoing series of professional development activities, preferably delivered on site. School leaders can ensure that professional development in this area is offered to all staff and preferably, in partnership with local Indigenous support staff or members of the community.
- *Professional accountability*: Attitudes and perceptions will impact on the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are taught, and on how Indigenous perspectives are incorporated across the school. Leaders might conduct, monitor and review agreed goals regularly, including teaching and learning practices used by staff.

Aboriginal children and their families need to feel a sense of belonging in schools. Herbert (2006) explains that for many Aboriginal people, as a result of their histories, "schools are the cause of all their problems. When they were kids, it was the school that took away their culture and their language. By the time the school had finished with them, they had nothing left."(p.74) Anecdotal evidence reveals that many schools throughout Australia are aware of this alienation and fear and have worked collaboratively with their school community to provide a 'welcome area' that is a space where Aboriginal people can feel welcome in the school. For example, many schools within the Northern Territory Department of Education host an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hub, unit or centre (or a parent room) within the school environment. This centre becomes a special place for many people within the school and offers a safe location for students and community to gather and plan events or discuss ideas or issues. This might be a room that has comfortable chairs, Aboriginal literature and artworks and so on. Many also hang Aboriginal artworks and flags around the school and negotiate 'belonging spaces' with students so that students feel like they belong.

Culturally responsive schools that have students with health problems such as Conductive Hearing Loss in classrooms, place high priority on attending to the needs of these students

by ensuring that extraneous noise such as lawn-mowers, fans, loud air-conditioners and not used during learning hours (if possible) and that teachers have microphones, speak 'face to face' to children and minimise background noise.

Schools might consider whether or not the artefacts in the school environment convey messages to students that they are recognised and honoured as members of the classroom and school community. Similarly they might consider what types of classroom arrangements (i.e. furniture, white boards) work best for creating different types of learning spaces for students and still provide non-threatening personal space for students.

Montgomery (2001) suggests that schools need to establish classroom 'atmosphere' that respects individuals and their cultures. They suggest that schools might include current and relevant bulletin boards that display positive and purposeful activities and events involving culturally diverse people, and a book corner that includes culturally diverse literature.

The ownership of information about Indigenous culture and histories that is gathered by students and staff and shared within a school community is a critical issue that can affect the school environment. Both Commonwealth laws relating to copyright and traditional lore relating to ownership of cultural knowledge should be observed in a school. Schools should ensure that appropriate copyright and permission forms are completed if and when students provide cultural information through interview, film or other record type. This is essential in order to ensure respectful relationships with the local community.

School leaders and staff can through their actions, show respect and validate Indigenous students and their families, by

- advocating for them within the school community,
- ensuring staff participate in community events,
- acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the school land at events such as assemblies and carnivals,
- providing opportunities for staff to relate their culturally responsive practices at staff meetings and professional development events, and
- providing information to the community about Indigenous events in school newsletters and calendars.

### **5.2.2 School Councils, Partnerships, Community Support and Engagement**

Local Indigenous communities offer a wealth of knowledge about cultural and spiritual knowledge, protocols and community processes, traditional learning, special events and contemporary responses to colonisation and current society. This knowledge can be used to inform and build culturally responsive processes in a school and its community.

Families and communities engage in practices that are focused on maintaining identity and educating their own children in ways that ensure they know who they are and where they are from (Groome, 1995). This practice does not stop or change when children start school. 'School readiness' is not about children being ready or 'prepared' for school, but rather schools being ready for children i.e. able to meet and accept them 'where they are at'. Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett (1982) maintain that families don't change their practices around schooling but rather reorganise them; "...the organization of the school varies with the kinds of families in its catchment and the nature of their collective practices". (p.31)

Connell (1995) recognised that there needs to be an emphasis in schools on building a cultural match between home and school. This can be the outcome of school-parent partnerships which have been shown to be an essential part in the success of children (Chrispeels, 1996; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1993).

Strong partnerships between local Indigenous communities and the school not only provide staff and teachers with opportunities to form relationships based on trust, but also empower community members to engage with schools. These partnerships are central to successfully developing and implementing culturally responsive programs and strategies, and for evaluating 'how the school and individual teachers are going' in their cultural competence journey.

Some examples of the ways that parents can successfully and effectively partner and engage with the school include programs that develop home conditions to support children's learning, programs that focus on improving parenting skills, improving communications between the home and school especially regarding school programs and the progress of children, the use of volunteers in the school, classroom and excursions, and including and involving parents in decision-making (Maynard & Howley, 1997).

Poelina (1994) reported that many Aboriginal people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia believed that they had no contribution to make in the operations of the schools attended by their children/grandchildren. This may have been the result of the fact that they were rarely invited to do so, their involvement being confined to informal, social gatherings and events (Harslett et al, 1999).

Partington (2002) described the 'empowerment model' of schooling in Australia, resulting largely from bilingual programs and 'two-way schooling' programs of the '80s and '90s, as Indigenous people themselves demanded a greater say and role in the education of their children.

Nichols (1993) rejected the views of researchers who blamed poor academic success of Indigenous children on their learning styles. She claimed that the real issue was the lack of Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education. Matthews et al, (2003) states that "To achieve self-determination, there needs to be Aboriginal people in control and making decisions. It cannot happen when there is always a non-Aboriginal person with the power to say 'yes' or 'no' as to what can happen". (p.8)

The 'empowerment model' of schooling has become in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a more 'multi-faceted approach' as a means of taking a holistic view on education (Partington, 2002). Elements that need to be brought together in schools include health (including nutrition), racism, family support, cultural factors (e.g. sorry business and initiation), empowerment issues, and role of the community.

This approach has led to a focus on *everything* which impacts on participation and the learning of Indigenous children, with schools and communities working together in partnerships.

In addition, schools *integrate* their leadership, school environment, organization, professional development, a framework of standards, and the curriculum (including monitoring, assessment and reporting) to meet specific goals established by governments across Australia. This new stance was detailed in a MCEETYA report (2000) that also required teaching and learning programs to occur in a supportive environment where respect and diversity are promoted.

The importance of *participation* in education and *provision* by schools should be highlighted in this discussion as two sides of the same coin; students have to *get to school* in order to achieve a quality education. Tripcony (2001) recognizes many factors that affect Indigenous participation in education.

These include: employment opportunities; isolation, alienation and marginalization; language and cultural barriers; employment opportunities; racism and prejudice; socio-cultural circumstances, and access to resources and services; and health and well-being.

Gribble (2002), on examining the literature concerning home-school-community partnerships, found that schools need to know how the link between these three entities works so that partnerships between the three groups (as co-teachers, co-learners, and co-supporters) can be created. In addition, she concluded that teachers need to support parents to understand the changing nature of education – especially for parents who have unfavourable and unsuccessful experiences with schools and schooling. There needs to be a simultaneous awareness by teachers of the purposes held for schooling by parents, which might range from children having access to the same opportunities as white children, to an apathy about the value schools might provide for the children.

The 2000 MCEETYA report provided the basis for successive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plans, the most recent of which, 2010-2014 (MCEECDYA , 2011) acknowledges that ‘improvements in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students arise from collaborative action that is responsive to local needs’.

(p.6) This plan requires action at national, systemic and local levels, drawing on the learnings of the past. However, as with the Report (MCEETYA , 2000) there is little information and attention to the power relations of the dominant culture and how this plays out in systems and local contexts where self-determination has not been embraced.

As early as 1980 the National Aboriginal Education Committee recognized that empowerment of Indigenous people in Education was vital. This has continued to be emphasized and reiterated in subsequent national policies and reviews.

The Flamboyant Foundation in their recent work on quality family engagement with schools (2011) indicate that trusting relationships and communications need to be two-way with families having a major role in their child’s learning through strong partnership and collaboration with the school.

The Alaskan Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools (ANKN, 1998) includes six standards for communities, as follows:

*A Culturally-supportive community*

1. Incorporates the practice of local cultural traditions in its everyday affairs
2. Nurtures the use of the local heritage language
3. Takes an active role in the education of all its members
4. Nurtures family responsibility, sense of belonging and cultural identity
5. Assists in learning and utilizing local cultural traditions and practices
6. Contributes to all aspects of curriculum design and implementation in the local school.

In addition, their Guidelines for culturally responsive communities, tribes and natives organizations, incorporated in the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Guidelines for Culturally Responsive School Boards (ANKN, 2002) include actions for communities (see Appendix 2).

### **5.3 Culturally Responsive Education Systems**

Previous sections outlined the importance of curriculum and pedagogy at the classroom level and whole schools approaches based on standards as important aspects of schooling reform. However, as indicated, these do not make up the entire schooling process which among others things is dependent on school policy and the profile of the workforce.

In Australia most school policy is determined by over-arching policies determined by State and Territory governments, and workforce profiles can be determined by availability.

In the United States theories about the achievement gap between different student subgroups of the population, abound. One of these is the theory of 'mismatch' suggested in a range of contexts in Sections 1, 4 and elsewhere in Section 5. According to this theory, "...children whose cultural background is European American have an innate educational advantage while children from other backgrounds are required to learn through cultural practices and perceptions other than their own" (Hollins, 1996 cited in Klump & McNeir, 2005, p.4).

Klump & McNeir, continue "Related to this argument is the idea that an education system rooted in the dominant culture is inherently biased. When one set of beliefs is held up as 'right' or 'normal', the values of other cultural groups are treated as less valid, and children from those groups can be perceived as culturally deficient" (2005, p. 4). They support this argument with evidence, citing higher rates of suspension and discipline among children of colour and disproportionate numbers of ESL learners in special education.

Australian classrooms have become more diverse than ever as a result of immigration and greater population movement resulting from access to transport and displacement through war and environmental catastrophes. However, teachers and other educators continue to be predominantly from middle class, European backgrounds. In the Northern Territory, for example, despite the fact that almost half the student cohort are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, only 12.1% of the Department of Education and Training workforce come from the same backgrounds (NTDET, 2010b).

This diversity in classrooms and the profile of teachers is mirrored in United States schools. In the U.S., CRS has been advocated for by scholars, Indigenous communities and Indigenous educational leaders as a promising *strategy* for improving the achievement of Indigenous (American Indian and Alaskan Native) students in schools (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Klump & McNeir, 2005).

Brayboy (2008), following his study of CRS for Indigenous youth (students aged approximately 5-15) made the following (summarized) recommendations for policy and practice to improve their educational experiences:

- Curricular materials should be immediately relevant to and mirror students lives, *and* provide entree into the core subject areas students will be expected to master in later grades;
- Educators must pay more attention to the ways colonization, racism, and power matter in educational settings and work towards more effective and longer term pre-service and in-service training that helps educators understand and strategize about their role as agents for social change and greater educational equity;
- Federal and state educational policies should be consistent with federal responsibility and self-determination;
- Funding formulae and guarantees should allow communities, schools and teachers to build students' multiple literacies;
- Locally-developed and controlled educational and cultural standards and corresponding forms of assessment should be used;
- Schools and districts should recruit and retain more Indigenous teachers who are members of the local community and have a strong foundation in promising practices for reading and literacy teaching, collaborations between university teacher preparation programs, Indigenous colleges, and school districts in tribal communities will facilitate this process.(p.19)

### 5.3.1 Preparing a Culturally Responsive Workforce

In consideration of the above discussion – in particular, the characteristics of culturally responsive educators – it seems imperative that organizations and government work to develop and instill these in their education employees. Teachers at the chalk-face need cultural competence and support in order to be culturally responsive, as do school leaders.

The need for a culturally responsive workforce has been outlined previously. Chisholm (1994) claims that the field which prepares teachers “for the social, political and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters” (Sims, 1983, p.43) is “as essential to teaching as nurturing is to human development” and, as a result “should permeate all pre-service education programs”. (p.1)

Consideration needs to be given concerning both how to prepare the *future* workforce (i.e. through teacher preparation) and also how to prepare/upskill the *current* workforce through in-service education.

Dunbar & Scrymgeour (2009) attribute reported deficient service delivery to Aboriginal people in Australia (Carson, et al 2007) to the history of colonization, minor coverage of Aboriginal studies in the secondary school curriculum, and a failure to embed Aboriginal cultural knowledge and skills in curricula and pedagogical approaches in tertiary institutions. Further, they claim that “Institutional responsibility for preparing a culturally competent workforce has long been neglected by Australian higher education institutions”. (p.10)

Morey & Kilano (1997) proposed a framework with three levels to support reflection on diversity in teacher education: Exclusive (lowest level - represents traditional mainstream perspectives of diversity including food, fun and folklore); Inclusive (middle level – mixture of normative and nontraditional diversity perspectives where diversity is discussed and compared with the dominant norm); Transformed (highest level – a structural transformation encouraging re-conceptualization by challenging traditional views).

Kea et al (2006) maintain that considering issues of diversity should be an inherent part of course conceptualization in tertiary pre-service. They explain this through the following examples: course description and objects should reflect how the course will contribute to the development of awareness and/or skills related to diversity; course texts, readings, and materials should include the interests and contributions of diverse populations and reflect multiple perspectives; course requirements, projects and activities should discuss the implications for ethnically and linguistically diverse learners; information and activities related to diversity should be infused throughout the course rather than ‘tacked on ‘ in isolated sessions; activities should not be presented in ways that disadvantage students with different cultural practice repertoires.

Although many Australian teacher education institutions offer courses in cultural diversity, these courses are usually optional. This means that many students can complete their teacher training without undertaking any preparation at all in cultural diversity. However, even if they do undertake specific preparation in teaching culturally diverse students, if this knowledge and pedagogy is not embedded or reinforced in the pedagogies studied for the subject material that teachers will teach (or indeed, if they are contradicted in these) then any positive effect will likely be ineffectual.

In addition, although teachers frequently learn the theories of multi-cultural education and cultural competence, the knowledges and skills are often not translated at the chalk-face. Jackson (1994) cites work by Sleeter (1990) whose analysis of multicultural workshops offered in various school systems showed that the workshops focused on awareness and sensitivity training and on enhancing intercultural understanding and recognition. Sleeter claims that although these are laudable goals, teachers continue to say “OK, I now know how non-mainstream students differ from mainstream students but how can I change my

delivery of instruction to address these differences?” She concluded that brief and superficial training may increase teacher knowledge, but has little or no effect on attitudes or behaviour (Jackson, 1994, p. 298). This can be a result of a range of factors including the mismatch between the theory and reality, in particular that courses studied do not engage with any *particular* cultural groups. Universities are often located in urban settings; student practicums often occur in urban or large provincial settings. Teachers posted to rural or remote settings need skills to transfer the knowledge they learned to specific settings, and support from education leadership to make the transfer.

Tripcony (2007) reminds us that the National Aboriginal Education Committee has, since its inception in 1976, called for cultural understandings and relevant skills to be incorporated into teacher education. She cites data from one Queensland region (1995) that “revealed that 8 out of 110 (7%) teachers indicated that they were competent and well-prepared to teach Aboriginal students; however, this competence was gained mostly from experience”. (p.8)

Villegas and Lucas (2002) encourage teacher educators to critically examine their teacher preparation programs and to integrate the six characteristics defining the culturally competent teacher (see Section 5.1.2) through their coursework, learning experiences and fieldwork in order to prepare culturally responsive teachers. They maintain that these six qualities are made up of an interconnected set of knowledges, skills and dispositions that need to be consciously and systematically woven into the learning experiences of pre-service teachers.

These six qualities must be taught as broad, generic capabilities that derive from personal, deep knowledge of themselves and the world around them. This will enable teachers on entering the workforce, to apply them to whatever cultural profile exists in their classroom and/or their school environment.

Prospective teachers must first examine their own socio-cultural identities (ways of thinking, behaving and being as influenced by race, ethnicity, social class, language and location) and how these have been shaped by membership to groups as a result of personal and family histories, in order to understand their future students. Prospective teachers should be supported to recognize the ways that schools perpetuate or reproduce the inequalities that exist in society whilst at the same time giving an illusion that these inequalities are fair.

In addition, prospective teachers should have an affirming attitude towards students who are not mainstream and differ from the dominant culture. “While recognizing that white, middle-class ways are most valued in society, affirming teachers understand that this status derives from the power of the white, middle class group rather than from any inherent superiority in socio-cultural attributes”. (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p.23)

As indicated previously, the attitudes held by teachers of their students – particularly the expectations they have of their learning – impact on what students eventually learn. It is therefore essential that these attitudes are positive and affirming.

Pre-service teachers need to be taught ways to convey this confidence to their students i.e. through exposing them to a rigorous curriculum, explicitly teaching strategies they can use to monitor their own learning, ensuring students know the high expectations they are expected to reach and holding them accountable for reaching them, and valuing and building on the individual and cultural knowledges and skill they bring with them to school. They also need to be shown the consequences of student learning of *not* having these affirming attitudes and high expectations.

Prospective teachers need to be supported to see themselves as agents of change in bridging the disconnect between schools and society; they are actors and participants in a

struggle for social justice and they can either support or challenge current inequalities (Cochran-Smith, 1997).

Cochran-Smith, (1991) recognizes that teacher educators must deliberately socialize teachers into the change-agent role since so many barriers block them functioning in this way in schools; time pressures, bureaucratic and hierarchic nature of educational systems, lack of support and active resistance by those in positions of power, to name a few. Villegas and Lucas (2002) state that “Teacher educators can prepare prospective teachers to become agents of change by teaching them about the change process, helping them to understand the obstacles to change, helping them develop the skills for collaboration and dealing with conflict, and providing evidence that schools can become more equitable.” (p.25)

Since students learn by making meaning of new knowledge and information by connecting it to what they already know, teachers need to help them to ‘build bridges’ (see Section 5.1.4) from what their students already know and bring with them to school, to what they need to learn. Pre-service courses must include knowledge and skills for prospective teachers to ascertain existing knowledge, determine what needs to be learned, and to then break down what needs to be learned into small steps that begin from what students already know. This process of ‘scaffolding’ falls down if teachers are unable to determine what their students already know (including the knowledge frameworks they work within, see Section 5.1.4), sometimes resulting in ‘deficit’ approaches to teaching where teachers assume their students know very little.

This type of teaching demands that teachers know the backgrounds and strengths of all their students and need to adjust their own teaching styles to each new group of students and the individuals in the group each year. Pre-service teachers need to be taught flexibility in making these adjustments each year so that they do not resort to ‘teaching the course’ or indeed, the class, but focus on the needs of each and every individual in their class.

This does not mean that there is no rigour in the instructional process; teachers need to know the standards that their students need to achieve and how to provide students with the time and additional support to meet those standards. Students should not be taught essential standards in ways that do not acknowledge their existing knowledge and skills; quality teaching should build on these through appropriate scaffolding.

This type of teaching demands that teachers know their subject matter *deeply* (see Section 5.1.2) and their students well, including their experiences and situations outside school (see Sections 3.2, 3.3). It is clearly impossible for pre-service students to have this knowledge about the students they will teach. Instead, they need to learn strategies for finding out, including how to build relationships with the students themselves, their families, and Indigenous workers in schools for this purpose. They also need to learn strategies for having conversations with their students in order to negotiate both the teaching and learning program and ways of demonstrating learning (assessment).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) provide examples of classroom-based practices that they believe are essential in the development of culturally responsive teachers in pre-service course. These include: students work together as a learning community, constructing meaning individually and socially through interaction; students undertake reflective writing about their beliefs and assumptions; students participate in cross-cultural simulations and games to gain personal knowledge of socio-cultural differences and power differentials that enable them to empathize and ‘stand in another’s shoes, to feel what others feel; students explore family histories by interviewing family members; students locate themselves in other communities and examine the privileges that come with affiliation with each one; students learn about the histories and current experiences of diverse groups; students examine case studies of successful teaching of diverse students in a range of settings (cited in Kea, et al, 2006, p. 9).

Teacher education institutions should ensure that students undertake practicums in settings that are culturally different from their own ethnicity and socioeconomic status. These should be followed by de-briefing sessions to promote self-reflection on personal experiences. Institutions can also promote meaningful immersion situations in community-centred activities for their pre-service teachers to force them to take time to learn about students and families. Another suggested strategy is to 'buddy' pre-service teachers with experienced and culturally responsive teachers.

A workshop report by the Menzies Foundation (2010) included in its Executive Summary, acknowledgement by participants that "the teaching of Indigenous students must be recognized as a specialist skill, with a highly trained, professional, committed and appropriately remunerated workforce."(p.8) It elaborated on this point by suggested that talented teachers should be especially recruited and supported in specialized training programs which "should be developed in partnership with senior Indigenous teachers and leaders, teachers of English as a second language, cross-cultural and behavioural experts, health experts, and sporting, music and art advisers." (p.8)

It is evident that in preparing teachers to be culturally responsive (both in pre-service and in-service) educators should begin with the characteristics and capabilities that teachers need and then ask reflective questions about how these skills are developed. They then need to incorporate the teaching and learning of the skills in their programs and curricula in ways that allow them to be transferred and 'tuned' to local contexts.

Organizations needs to ensure that school leaders have the culturally responsive skills to develop, value and support the skills needed of their teachers. They also need to themselves model these skills in the local community. Teachers that move from one locality and community to another should be supported on site to develop the culturally responsive skills needed in new locations.

Cross-cultural training programs and courses have been developed and adapted to school education organizations in most states and territories in Australia (e.g. *Crossing Cultures, Cultures of Collaboration*). Often these are undertaken off site by teachers new to a location or by school leaders.

Some concerns have been raised about the capacity of such programs to adequately measure their impact in respect to the application of the learning that results from them and the improved service delivery by participants on returning to their worksite (VOICE n.d.).

Bean (2006), in his report on the *Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training in the Australian Context*<sup>43</sup>, concluded that the effectiveness of cross-cultural training in contributing to the cultural competence of the Australian public sector depended on a number of related elements. He found that cultural competence needs to be linked closely to policy, values, and service delivery objectives and needs to be "expressed in high levels of political, leadership and managerial support for cross cultural training". (p.5)

He continues that at the individual level, Cross Cultural Training "is most effective when it addresses the concerns and motivations of participants and is provided within an organizational context that provides opportunities and incentives for applying acquired cross-cultural knowledge and skills to the workplace." (p.5)

The final recommendation of his report, recommended further research by Commonwealth, State and Territory employing authorities/jurisdictions of the overall scope and effectiveness of cultural competence training within the jurisdictions, the effectiveness of different training

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<sup>43</sup> Prepared for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs on behalf of the Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee

types and approaches, and the extent to which the learning is integrated into learning pathways in schools, VET and higher education sectors.

## 6.0 Concluding Comments

In 2000, the National Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation stated in their final report to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament, that

“A constant theme of council’s consultations has been that ‘education is the key’ to achieving reconciliation. By this, people imply three things. They seek education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in culturally sensitive ways to a point where they can participate as equals, with good jobs and economic security. They seek education of decision-makers and people who provide services so that they work through respectful partnerships and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Finally, they seek education of the wider community to understand the issues of education”.

*Council for Reconciliation, December 2000, p.53*

Cultural responsiveness in school education is surely about achieving these requests at the levels indicated in this statement. Culturally responsiveness in education cannot occur in the education sector alone – it must occur in the community as well if reconciliation is to be achieved.

The research in this volume supports findings and recommendations presented earlier in Section 2; some of these were made over 20 years ago (e.g. Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991).

Whilst the amount of research continues to grow and its nature becomes increasingly focused at the micro level, the broader findings, as presented in Section 4.3, remain the same, that is, strategies are more effective where there is:

- Community involvement and engagement.
- Adequate resourcing and planned and comprehensive interventions.
- Respect for language and culture.
- Working together through partnerships, networks, and shared leadership.
- Development of social capital.
- Recognition of underlying social determinants (e.g. financial disadvantage may affect school readiness and progress for young children).
- Commitment to working with, not for, Indigenous people.
- Creative collaboration that builds bridges between public agencies and the community and coordination between communities, non-government and government to prevent duplication of effort.
- Understanding that issues are complex and contextual.

*Source: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, AIHW, AIFS (2011)*

In schooling, educators might ask, how do we do all these? The research presented in this literature review ‘drills down’ into each of these macro recommendations, describing the ‘how’ at both the local and organizational level.

While we continue to amass more information about the ‘how’, it is frustrating that we, as both educators and communities, seem to be making only limited progress with the approaches we are using. It is clear that a serious commitment is needed to sustained and

focused effort. The effort needs to be maintained over a longer period than policy makers and politicians are often prepared to allow, sometimes becoming impatient for results and instigating new approaches before earlier efforts have been fully implemented, refined and evaluated (Perso, 2012b). Demmert, (2001) found a persistent and significant resistance to the implementation of Culturally Responsive Schooling by policy makers (state and federal) in the US; Klug & Whitfield (2003) also noted that many teachers consider approaches that integrate Indigenous culture are inferior and remedial.

It is clear that classroom teachers cannot be expected to attend to every strategy that works as outlined in this review. It is not, and has not been presented as a checklist. While regular personal and shared reflection on those presented here may trigger desired approaches, there seems little doubt that in order to provide successful learning and schooling experiences for Indigenous students educators must become more **bi-cultural**, that is we must better understand the belief systems and values of the primary culture of each of our students. This does not mean that non-Indigenous teachers will be given a 'skin-name' or gain membership in Indigenous cultures. Rather, it implies that teachers are willing to learn to understand their students and to meet their needs. This can only happen if they are "willing to become students of the cultures in which they are entering." (Klug & Whitfield, 2003, p.3) This makes the biggest difference at the classroom level and needs to be supported through policy and processes. This means it must also occur at all levels of the organizations responsible for schooling, including those preparing and developing teachers.

The biggest barrier to progress may be the ethno-centric attitude that the 'Western way' is the only valid and authentic way of viewing the world. This attitude blinds us to the rich variety of world views that are evident in other cultures, especially Indigenous cultures. Breaking through this barrier into ways of working that respect and try to deeply understand other cultures will likely prove fruitful for all cultural groups.

On reflection, we recall the statement by Sims (2011) in Section 4.1: "Cultural competence requires more than an awareness of Indigenous culture, but a willingness to engage with heart as well as mind...". (p.11) It is likely that the change in attitude may occur at the point (or period) in time on the cultural competence journey when understanding, moves from the head to the heart, resulting in a "how will I respond?" response rather than a "this is all very interesting" one.

Further research is needed concerning how best to build and sustain the pathway that prompts the shift from ethno-centric to bi-cultural education provision. I believe that it is this attitudinal change that will largely result in more culturally appropriate practices, rather than a checklist approach which some might see as an inevitable response to this review of 'what works'.

Quality education for all school students is an entitlement. Until we genuinely and actively engage with and respect the culture-of-origin of our students, the entitlement will remain undelivered for a significant proportion of Australian children.

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## APPENDIX 1: Otitis Media and Conductive Hearing Loss

The widespread prevalence of *otitis media* (which can cause Conductive Hearing Loss and Auditory Processing Disorder) amongst Indigenous children living in crowded housing and experiencing poor nutrition and inadequate health care<sup>44</sup>, has serious implications for teachers with respect to curriculum provision for these children and in particular, behavior management and pedagogy. For teachers, particularly in remote locations, wanting to know their students in order to recognize strengths and areas where support may be needed, it is essential that students with hearing problems likely to be caused by *otitis media* be identified.

### **Conductive Hearing Loss (CHL) and Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)**

In the Northern Territory (NT), there is an unusually high prevalence of *Conductive Hearing Loss* with up to 50% of the Indigenous population experiencing this condition due to Middle Ear Infection.<sup>45</sup> As many as 80% of children in some NT schools may experience Conductive Hearing Loss; in Queensland this figure is as high as 91%.<sup>46</sup>

CHL is caused by perforation of the ear drum. Aboriginal children are at high risk of getting the infection due to the close family conditions in which they live since exposure to other children increases the chances of catching a cold<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, Aboriginal children are more likely to have the infection longer during childhood (more than two and a half years) than non-Aboriginal children (three months) (OATSIH, 2001).

Although CDH and APD are considered to be health problems, they also contribute to social and education problems. Howard, (2004) found that childhood hearing loss contributes significantly to learning and behavioural problems at school, and that Aboriginal children with CHL were found to tease other children more, be often rejected by peers socially, and be more disruptive in class than other students (Howard, 2005).

It should be noted that *otitis media* can greatly reduce the hearing of children for long periods of time but is not permanent. Since different sounds have different frequency levels children can miss high frequency sounds such as *f*, *s*, *th* but have no trouble hearing lower frequency speech sounds. Children who hear some sounds and not others clearly give 'mixed messages' to their teachers about what they are learning and will obviously find participating very frustrating.

The following behaviours may indicate hearing loss:

- Poor articulation or pronunciation
- Frequent requests to repeat instructions
- Poor spelling
- Lack of attention
- Inappropriate responses
- Focusing on speaker's lips
- Frequent colds

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<sup>44</sup> As many as two thirds of Aboriginal children in northern Canada (Bowd, 2005), and 80% of Aboriginal children in remote Australian communities (Couzos et al., 2001)

<sup>45</sup> Northern Territory submission to the Senate Inquiry into Hearing Health, November 2009

<sup>46</sup> ASOHNS (2010) Deadly Ears Program. Surgical News, 11(7)

<sup>47</sup> ABC, 2003

- Earaches
- Rubbing ears
- Unnatural pitch of voice
- Turning ear towards speaker
- Speaking too loudly or quietly
- Discharge from ear<sup>48</sup>

In addition, children with CHL may present in school with behaviours that result from how they have been treated in their home and community, (see Howard 2006 and the submission to the child protection inquiry).

Children need repeated exposure to good language **modelling** if they are to learn language. The more children *hear* language spoken, the more they learn. When they have hearing loss that may vary from day to day due to CHL, the messages they hear can also vary on a daily basis. This impacts on the words they learn and therefore the size of their vocabulary. Also their ability to discriminate sounds in words (phonemic awareness) is impacted. Vocabulary size and phonemic awareness are extremely important elements in learning to read, write and spell<sup>49</sup> so the importance of the link between CHL and literacy cannot be overemphasised.

It is imperative that teachers of Indigenous children determine whether their students have CHL or a resulting APD in order to address their needs through appropriate pedagogies that will in turn minimise any poor student behaviours likely to present as a result of the condition. CHL will be discussed further in following sections on behaviour management and pedagogy.

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<sup>48</sup> Konza, D. (2006) *Teaching children with learning difficulties*. Cengage Learning Australia

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/abled/docs/RICPubClassIdeasK3.pdf> retrieved on 23 April 2010

## **APPENDIX 2: Guidelines for Culturally Responsive School Boards**

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network Guidelines for culturally responsive communities, tribes and natives organizations– incorporated in the Guidelines for Culturally Responsive School Boards (2002) include the following actions (as relevant for the Australian context: author) for communities:

*Communities will assist a culturally responsive school board through the following actions:*

- a. Support the selection of school board and local school community committee members...once selected hold them accountable for the responsibilities they have assumed
- b. Strengthen the parenting role as reflected in traditional kinship structures by adopting child-rearing as a collective responsibility, and make sure all community members know their kinship roles and responsibilities
- c. Sponsor and participate in regular parent/student talking circles in the community
- d. Promote healthy supportive organizations by involving students as board members and participants in all functions, meetings, workshops and events related to community well-being
- e. Organize local and regional planning meetings that lead to a consensus on strategies for consistent support of young people from all sectors of the community that impact their lives
- f. Be a good role model for and engage students in all aspects of community life, including in student-run organizations and councils
- g. Participate in and contribute to all aspects of the educational system serving your community, including taking an active role in regional and local school board meetings
- h. Provide encouragement and support for community members (students, aides, teachers) who show an interest in pursuing a career in education
- i. Sponsor a cultural orientation program for new school staff and include them in community activities and events. Implement an adopt-a-teacher program linking new staff to a family and Elders in the community
- j. Incorporate the cultural standards for communities and parents into daily life
- k. Foster the incorporation of traditional knowledge, values and beliefs in all aspects of community life and institutional practices and assist Elders in their participation as the local culture bearers
- l. Include the local school in all community development plans so that educational program and facilities are compatible with the long-term aspirations of the community
- m. Convene an annual community – or region-wide planning meeting of all local and regional social service, health, economic, cultural and educational programs to coordinate services for mutual support and benefit to the communities
- n. Develop a comprehensive Aboriginal education policy that addresses the role of language, culture and community in the education of local students, and implement the policy through strong partnership arrangements with the schools