

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

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

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*Abstract: This study presents the outcomes of the first phase of a three phase research initiative which begins by identifying through the voices of Aboriginal students and community members the teaching practices that influence Aboriginal student engagement and learning. The study occurs within the Diocese of Townsville Catholic Education schools in North Queensland, primarily in the Mount Isa area. Through open-ended interviews, Aboriginal students and community members express their views of the characteristics of effective teachers and effective teaching. Considering that the national education discourse in Australia is monopolised by discussion on teaching and teacher quality, we problematize this discourse based upon what members of the local Aboriginal community assert as characteristics of effective teachers and their practice. Further phases of this research initiative which investigate the effect of adjusted practice based upon what community members' assertions are also presented.*

### **Introduction**

Although Australia has a long-standing status as a country that delivers high quality education, data over the last decade from international evaluation assessments such as the Program for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2006, 2010) have continued to categorize Australia as a low equity-high quality education performer and provider (McGaw, 2006). That is, there is evidence of perpetuating inequity in school outcomes with a large and increasing achievement gap, especially between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Thus, it is not surprising that through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) all state, territorial and national governments in Australia have more recently agreed to a set of educational priorities and reform directions to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage (COAG, 2009). In The Melbourne Declaration (2008) this agreement aims to ensure learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students improve to match those of other students through a variety of actions. These include admonishing schools and their teachers to build upon local cultural knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a foundation for learning (MCEECDY, 2008). In line with this acknowledged issue, the current national discourse in education shows contest amongst a variety of stakeholders for methods by which this disadvantage can be addressed by improving teaching, few of which give consideration to the significance of students' cultural backgrounds as a determinant for influencing mainstream educational success (Sarra, 2011). Evident within this contest, especially in North Queensland where this study is situated, are divergent voices for informing change in teaching practice that can assist in improving educational outcomes for students in general and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students specifically (Archer and Hughes, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Nakata, 1999; Pearson, 2011; Rowe, 2006; Sarra, 2011; Yunkaporta, 2010). A significant voice, not only in Australia but Queensland specifically, is John Hattie's work based upon

his synthesis of more than 800 meta-analyses which identifies the impact of a long list of variables on educational achievement. Hattie (2003, 2009) identifies teachers and their teaching as a major source of variance in students' achievement. Hattie (2003) asserts we need to focus attention nationally on the specific actions of teachers that influence student learning outcomes. Hattie challenges teachers to '*know thy student*' and deeply consider the consequence of their teaching upon learning and engage in dialogue with students about their teaching and students' learning and, by doing so, as he refers, make learning visible (2009).

Notwithstanding the significant contribution Hattie's research has on informing teaching practice, alarmingly absent, from an international perspective, in his account is any acknowledgment of the deeper role culturally located teaching practices and, more broadly, culture in general are likely to have in improving student learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, despite the reference to such by The Melbourne Declaration. As Snook et al. (2009) challenge within the New Zealand—Aotearoa context, Hattie's quantitative research on "teacher effect" and its accompanying list of teaching practices are applied in isolation from the cultural and social context. As asserted by Sarra (2011), enacted curriculum, including teaching practice, must demonstrate links between school and the everyday realities of Indigenous peoples' life practices, histories and cultures. By treating all students, however much they differ, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system gives its sanction to the initial (and historical) inequality in relation to culture (Bourdieu, 1990). As asserted by Lingard (2007), a 'pedagogy of indifference' will continue to prevent marginalised students from accessing the cultural capital that is rewarded within mainstream education.

Potentially the most comprehensive document for supporting informed improvement in teacher effectiveness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australia which encourages the need for, in contrast, a 'pedagogy of difference' is the recent unassumingly released and seldom acknowledged Cultural Responsiveness and School Education by Thelma Perso of the Menzies Institute (2012). The document, like Hattie's, is a compilation of effective teaching practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students gathered over several decades that Perso asserts must be considered in making learning more effective for Indigenous students. It is important to emphasize that many of the identified practices in this document, such as teacher clarity, explicit instruction and provision of feedback to students correspond with the assertions made by Hattie (2009) and Rowe (2006). Despite this correspondence, the document makes Hattie's meta-analysis appear pale as nowhere in Hattie's summation is there reference to culturally responsive pedagogy - assuming a uniform application of such practices for all students and thus dismissing the potential context- and culture-bound nature of learners and learning (Perso, 2012; Snook et al., 2009).

Despite the often quoted characteristics of CRP and the plethora of untested 'good ideas' in the Australian literature, no systematic and empirically-based research provides any conclusive indication of 'what works' in influencing Indigenous students' learning (Price & Hughes, 2009). The Menzies Institute (2012) document, similar to Castagno and Brayboy's (2008) international challenge, calls for [state and Commonwealth] governments to support empirically-based research to verify the culturally located practices identified as likely or possible contributors to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' achievement. Considering Hattie's imperative to make learning visible by opening the dialogue between students and teachers, what is particularly absent is any research that responds to and verifies through empirically based research what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities are saying about the teaching practices that influence their learning. As Rowe (2003, p.22) laments, "there is a growing uneasiness [in Australian education] related to how little is known about teacher quality from Indigenous students' own perspectives". As Craven et al. assert (2007, p. 4) "there is astoundingly little known about what Aboriginal students see as the qualities of effective teachers and the impact this has on educational outcomes." As well, Craven et al. state, "There is a need to critically validate the generalisability of [Hattie's and Rowe's] findings to Aboriginal students to tease out facets of quality teaching that are

salient to Aboriginal students; elucidate their perspectives of teacher quality; and test the influence of specific facets of quality teaching on academic outcomes and the consequences of the findings for developing interventions for Aboriginal school students” (2007, p. 4). The research described here focuses on addressing this imperative. In this paper, we present the outcomes of the first phase of a three phase research initiative which arises to support a move towards a better understanding of teaching quality from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait student and parent perspective; that is, to determine the teaching and teacher classroom practices that have value in learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The following question guides our research: What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members identify as the teaching practices that influence their learning? We conclude by presenting an Effective Teaching Profile for the Aboriginal students represented from the findings of this study which will be tested through teacher implementation in the next two phases of research.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

We define this research, informed by the ideas and explanations of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of students to make learning more closely linked to and effective for them (Gay, 2000). Although several studies have focused on the identification of the critical elements of instruction influencing the school success of Indigenous students in northern Australia (e.g., Osborne, 1991, 1996, 2001), there are no publications that, collectively, (1) began by eliciting the community’s perspective of their experiences and aspirations for education, especially with mention of teaching practice; (2) enacted changes in teaching practice grounded in the suggestion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait students themselves and their Indigenous educators; and, ultimately, (3) determined the effect of such enacted practices at the classroom level. Two ongoing internationally-based research and development projects, one based in northern Canada (Lewthwaite, 2007; Lewthwaite & Renaud, 2009; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan & Renaud, 2013, Lewthwaite et al., 2014) and the other in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Bishop, 1996, 2003, 2011; Bishop et al., 1999, 2003, 2012), have provided an invaluable platform for this study because they place authority on students’ and their community’s ability to identify and communicate understandings of what influences their learning. Both projects currently inform policy development and improvement at a territorial and national level in response to what students and community members are saying about their learning in Indigenous (i.e., Inuit, First Nations, or Māori) settings, especially where educational success has been thwarted by a variety of factors, in particular, the marginalization of Indigenous culture and aspirations for education from the formal education landscape. Further, they seek to determine through quantitative methods whether the influence of the enactment of such practices have a mediating influence on Indigenous students’ learning.

In the first project of significance to this study, Lewthwaite and colleagues (Lewthwaite, 2007; Lewthwaite & Renaud, 2009; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan & Renaud, 2013, Lewthwaite et al., 2014) have engaged with several northern Canadian Inuit and First Nations communities and their parents and students in conversations to identify the pedagogical actions that influence their learning. By developing an understanding of the actions and interactions that supported or inhibited student engagement and learning, the authors have assisted schools and policy makers in identifying effective teaching and classrooms practices that have reduced the rupture between home culture and school for Indigenous students. The researchers along with community members participating in the research process refer to this practice as a ‘pedagogy of consequence’ (Lewthwaite et al., 2014) rather than a ‘pedagogy of indifference’ as described in Australia by Lingard (2007). As well, the researchers have been able to identify through statistical methods the influences of these adjusted teacher behaviours on Indigenous students’ learning

(Lewthwaite et al., 2013, 2014) relative to non-Indigenous students. Some of these behaviours include (1) explicit attention to supporting students in navigating the literacy and numeracy nuance of 'schooling'; (2) adjusting teacher communication patterns to 'undertalk' rather than 'overtalk'; (3) communicating caring to students through actions such as high expectations, encouragement, challenge, and time spent with each student; (4) ensuring learning in classrooms that is not just centred on a teacher's contribution; and (5) connecting learning to student's lives, with special emphasis on those cultural/community elements that affirm local culture/community.

In a second project of significance to this study, Bishop and colleagues (1999, 2003) in their *Te Kotahitanga* project in Aotearoa-New Zealand have identified through their conversations with Māori students a variety of practices that contribute to both positive learning environments and student success in learning practices. By so doing, they have developed an 'Effective Teaching Profile' for teachers of Māori students based on operationalizing interaction and pedagogical practices that students believe address and promote their educational achievement. The influence of the *Te Kotahitanga* project with its emphasis on adjusted teaching practices on student learning outcomes is well documented (2003, 2011, 2012).

Both research projects, mentioned above, are similar because they determine from the perceptions of Indigenous students the teaching practices that contribute to their success as learners. These researchers then use students' voice as a foundation for teachers' reconsideration of practice to draw into question the protocols of mainstream classrooms and, in response, encourage teachers to work towards a dynamic and synergistic relationship between home and community culture and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1996). This questioning ultimately and purposely 'problematizes' teaching, upsets the orthodoxy of classrooms, and encourages teachers to query the nature of the student-teacher relationship, their teaching, the curriculum, and schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1995). By creating this disequilibrium, educators are pushed to seek resolution of these issues to move their classrooms to become more culturally responsive as they employ a culturally preferred and relevant pedagogy. The underlying premise of culture-based education is that the educational experiences provided for children should reflect, validate, and promote their culture and language and be cognizant of students' socio-political histories and future aspirations. These experiences should be reflected, not only in the management and operation of schools, but also in the curricula and programs implemented and pedagogies used (Irvine, 2003; Klenowski, 2009). It assumes that students come to school with a whole set of beliefs, skills, and understandings formed from their personal and generational experience in their world, and that the role of the school is not to ignore or replace these understandings, histories and skills, but to recognize the teaching practices and understandings within the cultural context which most appropriately respond to these for the benefit of each student and the community each represents (Fanshawe, 1989; Munns et al., 1999). It is not surprising that culturally responsive pedagogy is commonly referred to as one form of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is defined as an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect this knowledge as a foundation for taking constructive action (Giroux, 2010). By so doing CRP draws into question, challenges and intentionally seeks to change existing social and political structures that have historically and currently impinge upon the teacher-student interface.

The primary intent of this North Queensland Catholic Education initiative is to respond to the critical awareness of the possible injustice of existing social orders, including education, that have historically and, arguably, continue to this day disenfranchise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families (Dunn, 2001) through, in this study's case, the classroom pedagogies influencing students' learning. In response, critical theory re-examines and ultimately assists in the re-construction of practices in order to work towards a social order based upon a reconceptualization of what can and should be (Ewert citing Habermas, 1991). Most evident within the critical theory writing is the emphasis on the idea of a growing 'consciousness' of one's condition amongst individuals, a 'conscientisation' as Freire (1970) refers, as the first step to constructive action in an

educational practice of consequence for students. It is this growing ‘consciousness’ that the authors would like to emphasize as important to the research presented herewith and, we feel, is most evident in the conversational data to be presented in this study. This advocacy has long been held but largely ignored in North Queensland schools (Nakata, 1999; Osborne, 1996, 2001; Yunkaporta, 2010). As Perso (2012) has asserted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ lack of educational success can derive from, to a greater degree, the inability of schools to meet the learning needs of their Indigenous citizens through the experiences offered and pedagogies used in classrooms. She asserted that this failure includes not only resource and language materials appropriate for each context, but also, more importantly, the culturally located pedagogy that moves beyond the *what* of classrooms to understanding the *how*, *why* and *possibilities* of classrooms. These claims have been advocated for but tragically ignored for decades in Indigenous settings (Lewthwaite et al., 2012; Malin, 1989; McCarty et al., 1991; Osborne, 1996; Wolcott, 1967, 1974). Although culture-based education may be rhetorically premised as the foundation of North Queensland classrooms, what would classroom environments and teacher practices look like that are, indeed, reflective and mindful of Aboriginal students’ histories, preferences and current circumstance? Such is the focus of this study.

### **Context, Methods and Modes of Inquiry**

The overall aim of this research was motivated by the Diocese of Townsville Catholic Education’s desire to better inform their teachers in seeing the realization of Aboriginal and Torres Strait aspirations for education evidenced in the practices of teachers within the Diocese. This research project, overall, focuses on developing Catholic Education teacher cultural competence in schools through fostering understanding of culturally responsive classroom pedagogy for its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; assisting teachers in embracing such pedagogy; measuring the influence of this adjusted pedagogy on student learning and identifying and understanding the influences on teachers’ adapted teaching. Catholic Education in Australia is at a critical stage in its developmental history. Although it has a long-standing status as an educational provider of high quality and high equity education, there is ongoing concern about inequity in educational performance, especially amongst its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. Although this concern resonates with educational performance data across state schools as well, this is a disconcerting issue for Catholic Education because of its fundamental mission to seek to overcome the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve equitable education outcomes (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2012). As stated by the Diocese, “a Catholic education provides students with more than just academic instruction. Students from Kindergarten through to Year 12 are educated to develop academically, spiritually, socially, emotionally and physically to become compassionate and contributing members of our world” (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2012). Of central importance to Catholic Education is ensuring that its schools, especially its students, teachers and administrators, challenge the prevailing view that disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous students is ‘normal’ and modest incremental gains are acceptable (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2012). Each Catholic Education authority is obligated to develop sustainable procedures to produce equitable outcomes for its Indigenous students through the classroom learning experiences provided for its students (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2012). Catholic Education recognizes that engaging teachers in inclusive curriculum practices is vital to this success, and a central focus in its commitment to provide equitable learning outcomes (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2012).

The methodology for the overall research project is informed by participatory action research (PAR) (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988), especially that conducted by the first author in First Nation and Inuit communities in northern Canada (Lewthwaite, 2007; Lewthwaite & Renaud, 2009;

Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan & Renaud, 2013, Lewthwaite et al., 2014. Such research draws upon the collective aspirations and efforts of each of the school communities involved, in this study's case, its teachers, students, parents, administrators, and supporting Elders as researchers in collaboration with university researchers. In line with participatory action research efforts, the study seeks to (a) identify common goals for pedagogical practice, (b) implement strategies for achieving these goals at the classroom and school level, (c) evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching practices on student learning outcomes and the efforts to achieve set goals, and, finally, (d) respond to the evaluations with further courses of action. In our research, we (the seven authors both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) are researchers working, in some cases as employees of Catholic Education, with Aboriginal students, parents, teachers, teacher aides and administrators to see the realization of the research goals. This means listening to each school community and its members in approaching the research in a manner seen as appropriate by each school's Aboriginal staff members and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee for Catholic Education. Although this study, ultimately, engages both school members and community members in this conversation, in this reported research our focus is on the commentary of Aboriginal parents and students only.

The study employs a variety of data sources to improve the confirmability and transferability in the findings. These sources consist of student data from individual interviews with (a) 27 grade 9-12 students, all self-identifying as Aboriginal, in four schools, (b) group interviews with 16 Grade 9-12 students from four schools, and (c) individual and group interviews with 27 parents and caregivers, some being Indigenous teachers, from all five schools. Interviews were conducted by the first author along with the fifth, sixth and seventh authors, who are Aboriginal teachers from the local school community. In all cases and in line with empirical existential phenomenology (Crotty, 1996) we asked abbreviated questions that provided opportunity for students', parents' and caregivers' to reflect on, without interruption or prompting, prior formal (school-based) and informal (family or community-based) learning experiences. It is our impression that the students and families participating in this study were those who were currently engaged in the education process and cannot be deemed representative of the entire student and parent population associated with these school communities.

In the semi-structured interviews, we asked questions that focused on individuals identifying (a) teaching and learning experiences they had had within informal contexts, such as in their homes or in the community, (b) teaching and learning experiences that people had had within more formal contexts, such as in school, and, in these experiences describing, (c) what their teachers (both informal and formal) did to help them to learn, (d) what was happening when they were learning best both in informal and formal settings, (e) what they would change about their teachers' teaching to assist them in their learning, (f) teachers of good consequence and the characteristics of these teachers, both in informal and formal settings and (g) if they (or their child) was to get a new teacher, what would they want the teacher to know about them (or their child) and their learning? In each interview, we left it open to the student or parent to decide which of these statements to respond to. In all cases, the interviews were 'a chat' (Bevan-Brown, 1998; Bishop and Glynn, 1999) based upon the need for collaboration between researchers and researched to construct the final story capturing the fundamental essence of participants' experiences (Van Manen, 2007) as evidenced in the vignettes and themes to be presented in a subsequent section.

All conversations were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The data collected, once analysed by the research team (that is, all authors) were shared with the Catholic Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee and with the teaching and administration staff of the five Catholic Education schools in which the study was located. All teachers were invited to respond to students' comments about teacher behaviours that influenced their learning. These meetings involved the entire elementary-middle years teaching staff which, typical of Catholic Education settings, was predominantly non-Indigenous. We verified transcribed sections of the



conversations as accurate through our conversations with each other as researchers and with, where possible, students, parents and their teachers. Thematic analysis was conducted by the seven researchers individually and then collectively.

The first step in the thematic analysis process involved open coding, which involved reading each of the transcripts to identify and code significant quotes. Coding allowed the researchers to individually and collectively review the whole of the data by identifying the breadth of comment and its most significant meaning as pertaining to effective teaching. The preliminary analysis of the interview data from this stage, integrated with the literature, was used to inform the accounts now to be presented.

## Results

Because the purpose of this research was to identify what participants identified as influences upon their learning and characteristics of effective teachers, we have organized the themes from our data around these headings. Again, what we report primarily focuses on comments where consensus was evident among the participants and the majority of participants made these comments. In each of the sections, we present responses that correspond with the theme category. We purposely privilege the participants' comments over the authors' commentary as suggested by our participants, a request that has often been reiterated of the first author (Lewthwaite et al., 2014). By doing so, we make effort to make prominent the views of participants, who as one participant asserted, "I made my opinion before [at a local school] but it did not change the way things were. I want my opinion to be listened to". It is noteworthy that the responses quoted below are exemplars and do not capture all of the behaviours that were mentioned, despite many adult participants wanting their comments to be made public and in full. Further, we draw attention to the literature, especially the historical literature, on suggested practices for affecting learning for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

### *Theme One: Parent Voices: Teachers' Understandings and Beliefs about Students and Their Communities Are Antecedents for Effective Teaching*

Of significance to this study and the effective teaching profile that emanates from this data was the distinct difference in the content of the responses that came from parents as compared to students. The comments from parents and carers almost exclusively pertained to systemic issues in education commonly identified in the Australian literature (for example, Frigo et al., 2004), whereas responses from students tended to be associated with tangible expressions of such issues in teachers' practice. In each section we present vignettes of the conversations in italics to identify this as a participant comment, and to preserve anonymity make no mention of name. Five such themes were evidenced in the parental comments. These included:

#### *Understanding Our History with Education*

*It is important to know and understand our history with education. It's a history I do not think many teachers know. It might be a part of the past, but knowing helps to build a better future for our children. It is an important history as it helps to understand how many parents and their children approach education today. For many, including my parents, it was not positive. School was not a welcoming place. You weren't made to feel welcome so for every [Aboriginal] person there is that reservation – a mistrust with schools, and with teachers. It's just too much a part of our history. So, when our children go to school I think they carry that same sensitivity to school and to teachers. They can sense it and until they are really sure and certain, there will be that mistrust in the background. Until they see something different,*

*there will be that mistrust. It is taking a long time to change. There was a time I felt schools were changing to be more aware of what was important to us. That is the bad part [of the past]. It never has worked for us. Sometimes there will be a bit of a change but not much. [Schooling] is still not something we have say in.*

*It takes a long time to build that trust. For some parents it will never occur [because of their past experiences]. So for their children, it might never occur. That wall is really there to keep you safe. Why should I trust [because our past would tell us not to]? So, keep your distance. It's when we see familiar faces at the school, that's when things begin to change. You see someone at the school you know [mentions names] and then you have the start of trust. You feel like there is someone there that makes you feel welcome. So you think - that's a good sign for my child. You have someone who you think will have your child's interest at heart. That's what I want. Just to know that someone is looking out after her.*

At the forefront of parents' responses was their socially constructed experience with mainstream education. Parents expressed a desire for change, but realized that their history, collectively and individually, is negative, not forgotten and influenced how they interpreted and responded to their current experiences, especially through the experiences of their children. The historical ramifications of the influence of the consequence of colonial history as expressed by these parents has strong resonance with findings from ethnographies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history nationally and Indigenous (Native American, First Nations, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Maori) settings internationally over several decades. For example, the parent comment about not understanding "our history with education" is also made by Dunn, 2001; Nakata 1999 and Kerwin, 2011 in Australia; and a broad range of contexts internationally (Wolcott in a Kwakiutl school setting (1967; 1974); Dumont and Wax in a Cherokee high school (1976); Osborne in two Zuni elementary schools (1983) and Wilson in a Lakota Sioux high school (1991). As asserted by Wilson (1991, p. 381), "Academic success or failure is fully understandable only in its macro-historical, macro-social, microeconomic and macro political context". It is also this history that parents perceived to be continuing, unchallenged and unchanged. Effective teaching had to acknowledge this history, and acknowledging this history was identified as an integral initial step for altered change in practice.

#### *Understanding the 'Code-Switching' Required of Our Children*

*Teachers don't know the difference how we are at home and how we must do things at school. I tell my children that to be successful at school they have to 'be' a certain way. You can talk that way at home [referring to non-Standard Australian English] but when you are at school you have to speak a [certain] way, even behave a certain way. You just can't go 'walkabout'. Get up out of your seat when you want. Put your hand up to ask questions.*

*[My children] have to know how [schools] work. My oldest did really well, then the second. You kind of figure out what is important and what you need to do. Then it works well. It is mainly the English and maths. That's what really counts. So you read at home just to make it better for them. We don't usually do that [at home] but you have to do that if they are going to be success [at that school].*

Parents understood the nuance of schools and what was privileged for influencing success in schools (Delpit, 1995; Rowe, 2003), not only academically but also socially. These inputs about the social norms and imperatives of schools, especially the language protocols, are supported in ethnographies representing Indigenous peoples both nationally and internationally (Hudsmith in an

Aboriginal primary school (1992); Lipka in a Yup'ik primary school (1991); McLaughlin in a Navajo elementary and secondary school (1989)). Lewthwaite et al. (2014) assert that the 'matter of schools' and means by which Indigenous students succeed in mainstream schooling is largely grounded in students proficiency in the social form of conduct and behaviours and the symbolic form of literacy and numeracy privileged by schools. Student's home culture was seen to be incommensurable and discontinuous with school culture and academic success (Clancy & Simpson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Several parents understood this imperative and actively sought to inform and equip their children in meeting this imperative.

#### *Understanding Our Perceived Inability to Change Schooling as It Exists Today*

*You really feel like you are at the mercy of the school and the teacher. You don't have any say. You want it to work better for your children [than it did for me], but you can't control that.*

*We haven't been able to believe that what [I] say might be listened to. Teachers can make the difference. They can make it good or bad. You watch it at the start of the year. If it's going to be a bad year [for my child] because of the way [my child] is treated then you can't change that.*

Parents' comments indicated that they had little influence on the way schools operated, especially what was perceived as an unquestioned operation that catered to the aspirations and patterns of the dominant society only and, as they perceived, made little allowance for difference. These comments about parents' inability to change or disrupt schooling and teacher actions are commonly mentioned both in the national (Luke et al., 1998; Sarra, 2011) and international literature (Delpit, 1995, p.46). Drawing from Gramsci's construct of hegemony (1971) parents' comments gave evidence of their conscious awareness of the invisible mechanism of control by which all schools operate, especially in the impact they have in minimizing the influence they as parents have on existing protocols, in particular at the classroom interface between student and teacher.

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

*Just the way the school thinks of [my child]. That is what is important. Just to believe they are capable and not to ignore them. You really want [teachers] to give your child the best opportunity. Not just think that [my child] will not be a good student. Sometimes I think [teachers] have their mind made up right away. On that first day, you want the teacher to be saying [in their actions] that your child is important and has the [potential] to learn, just like every other [child]. I think sometimes they say, just another [Aboriginal child] that will act up or have learning problems or be bad in the classroom. Just the way [the teacher] might think before they even have a chance.*

*That's why just those basic skills of making someone feel 'welcome' –really welcome are important. Just a smile, a gesture, a comment – all of those things are so important. Even more is if those things aren't there when you go to a school. We need to receive that gesture, that smile, that comment. If it is indifferent, then that's telling us we aren't welcome. My parents experience with education was not positive. I picked up on that, and I know what it feels like to not feel welcome – to not be treated like I am welcome. There is a difference between being made welcome and being made to feel like you are not welcome. It doesn't take much to make you feel either welcome or not welcome. We want our children to feel*

*welcome and a teacher can do so much to make that happen. It has changed for my children. When I was at school I never felt there was a teacher that was interested in me or believed in me [as a learner]. Now that has changed, especially at the primary school.*

Apparent in the comments from parents was their hope for their children's education and for teachers' positive perceived views of their children. In most conversations, participants perceived, through their own experience as learners or second-hand through their children's experience, that they had been viewed pathologically by teachers as 'lesser' or 'not as capable as' [non-Indigenous learners] (Shields, Bishop and Mazawi, 2005). These beliefs, in turn, influenced how teachers interacted with students and parents (Trouw, 1997). As Bishop et al. (2003) assert, at the heart of many school systems' thinking is a belief or, at least, an assumption that Western ways are superior and that Aboriginal culture, and specifically students, may bring deficits to classrooms, not assets. Such thinking implies that not only are students' background experience and knowledge of limited importance to promote learning, but so are their cultural foundations. Deficit thinking or theorizing, as it is called, is the notion that students, particularly low-income, minority students, fail in school because they and their families experience deficiencies such as limited intelligence or behaviours that obstruct learning or that they have little aspiration for educational success (Bishop, 2003; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Valencia, 1997).

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

*The school wants the [Aboriginal community] to connect with the school in ways other than NAIDOC [National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee]. But that really takes time. It starts when you see [Aboriginal] people working at the school. You see them there or you hear they are at the school where your children are and you think that's good. Then there is someone there and that begins that relationship. Then you think that your child can go there and they go there because you feel confident they will be looked after. You look at the pictures in the paper and you see Aboriginal students and maybe more Aboriginal students. You see children having success when they graduate. You then believe that the school can work for your child too. It is getting better and slowly you begin to believe that it is improving. Then you have that history being replaced. Before it didn't work for [Aboriginal] children and then you think it is working now. That is important. But it is a long process.*

*When I went to school, who I was [as an Aboriginal woman] was not important and you were made to feel it was not a good thing. I never remembered anything at school that made me feel proud I was [Aboriginal]. That is not what I want [today for my children].*

*Most is that [school] will be a place where [my children] can be proud of who they are. I don't want them to learn but then put away who they are [as Aboriginal people]. In the past that is what happened to me and that is what I want to see change. A school and classroom that says who I am [as an Aboriginal person] is important. That there can be learning in the school that says who I am is important. Not put it away. I think that's why so many [Aboriginal people] stay away. It's not a place where you can be who you are.*

Participants asserted that they wanted the formal curriculum to be the vehicle for the development of personal attributes they deemed as important, especially students' self-beliefs about themselves as learners and culturally located individuals (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2010; Milgate & Giles-Browne, 2013; Sarra, 2011). These comments indicated parents are seeking an alternative to

tokenistic recognition of culture that Ladson–Billings (1995, p. 22) identifies as mere “celebrations of diversity”. Instead, they sought incorporation and affirmation of Indigenous perspectives and histories authentically through relationships with teachers and schools that confirmed students’ cultural heritage (Hanlen, 2002; Harrison, 2011; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). It is suggested, that if teachers hold deficit views of students and their cultures, they have little awareness of the agency they possess for enabling student learning, especially in drawing upon students funds of knowledge as a scaffold to high-status cultural capital (Lingard & Keddie, 2013). By so doing, if teachers regard students and the culture they represent from an asset perspective, they are aware they have the agency to respond to students’ learning preferences (Valencia, 1997). The parents here were looking beyond mere academic success to include attention to the whole child, as a culturally located individual. As Eisner (1979) suggested, schools, and education in general, are often focused on the intellectual growth of the student in those subject matter areas most worthy of study, usually reducing the focus on personal and social goals. Broadening learning beyond intellectual growth is central to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Gay, 2000) and consistent with the aims of Catholic Education.

In summary, participants provided direct evidence on the impacts their parents and/or they themselves have experienced historically in schools. This provides *prima facie* support for the claims made, and that are supported by Snook et al. (2010) about these important omissions from the work of Hattie (2009) and Rowe (2006). These omissions impact on how teachers interact with students and community and, hence, help to explain the limited success of schools trying to improve Indigenous student outcomes. It does not mean that Hattie’s meta-analysis or the work of Rowe should be ignored nor even replaced, but it does indicate a fruitful way to investigate ways to deepen teacher understanding of, especially, students’ social and historical backgrounds and, in light of this, the imperative to re-consider the construct of effective teaching. Parents’ claims give unquestionable evidence of Freire’s notion of conscientisation (1970), drawing attention to the problematic nature of treating all students the same. However much they differ, as equal in rights and duties, [parents believe] by doing so the educational system actually gives its sanction to the perpetuation of long-standing inequality in relation to culture (Bourdieu, 1990).

### *Theme Two: Student Voices: Developing Positive Relationships are Crucial as a Foundation for Learning*

In contrast to parents’ conscious awareness of historical inequity, was students’ attention to their everyday school and classroom experiences. Students’ commentaries largely reiterated a tangible outworking of parental comments especially in reference to the importance of relationship as the determinate precursor to constructive, benign or destructive student-teacher relationships and learning. We present two commentaries that focus on patterns of relationship.

*You can tell she is interested in us all. Every day she lets us know she is interested in us. She tells us about her life and she’s interested in my life. She wants to get to know you. Not just friendly stuff but making you feel you are important and that you can do alright in his subject. In the class she’ll spend lots of time with you and not make a scene about it with the rest of the class. You feel welcome.*

*I think she’s a good teacher because she gives you time. She’s not bossy. But she’s not soft. She takes time to get to know you in the classroom but will talk to you at Coles [shopping store]. My dad noticed that. That is the way it is in the classroom. Because she is that way with us, we try hard to be that way with everyone. Everyone is important. No matter who you are. Then, this all shows in how we behave to each other, not just to her.*

Similar to the responses of parents and as commonly noted in the literature (Frigo, 1999; Harrison, 2011; Munns et al., 1999), students' responses, overall, focused strongly on the need for positive relationships in the classroom environment where each individual was respected and seen as important. It is likely that the most commonly mentioned words from student participants, overall, were the words 'welcome', 'care' and 'relationship', words that are vanquished from the dominant 'effective teacher' discourse today. Manifest in the description of the relationships was a priority on caring. Caring manifested itself in actions—it supported, expected, it challenged, it affirmed and it was responsive to each individual and their situation (Lewthwaite et al, 2010). It is our understanding that the theorist that is most closely aligned with the community's admonition for education is Nel Noddings who suggests:

The key, central to care theory, is this: caring-about (or, perhaps a sense of justice) must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish. Although the preferred form of caring is cared for, caring-about can help in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing it. Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs. Caring-about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations (Noddings, 2002, p. 23).

In summary, student participants' responses implied that a pedagogy of difference for Catholic Education educators needed to be, first and foremost, based upon a pedagogical relationship underpinned by an ethic of care (Noddings, 2002; Osborne, 1996).

### *Theme Three: Student Voices: Cultural Bridges Are Used to Promote Learning*

Several students made comments pertaining to local community and the resources of the community as positive influences, both directly and indirectly on their engagement with school and learning.

*When you know the teacher is interested in you, you are willing to share [stories] about your family [history] and other things. I know lots about my family [past history] and he will use examples that relates to some of those areas [from the area]. Battle Mountain was really important story. I had heard about that but not too much. That really opened everyone's eyes to know that [the battle between the white police and Kalkadoon people] had happened not long ago. There were lots of pictures and stories. It made it really interesting. Now, I can see that learning that was important and why native title is so important...It wasn't just one sided and he just doesn't do the talking....It was like there was more than one side to the story. The story was important and he chose to do that. Right here in Mt Isa. Not far away. It just helps you to understand that there is a history here and it does involves [Aboriginal people]. I don't think many are aware of that. That was really important learning. As a [states career choice] I want those stories to be talked about. Not just the important places around that are special [local country places named] but the stories where there was conflict.*

*You want it to be a place where you feel welcome. That's the school, but you want it in the classroom too. Where learning that talks about this area and our people are important. There is [someone] who would be a great person to have in the school all the time. He is there now and that makes such a difference he can connect with. Just his knowledge and how students relate to him. I think it sends a message that school needs to do that more.....learning that encourages [my children] in showing who they are and that the school encourages that*

[Aboriginal people can contribute to the learning process]. *The school sees the importance of doing this. It is a priority.*

Evident within these accounts is the imperative for continuity rather than discontinuity between school and students' life world. At a deeper level, is the inferred reason for the assurance of continuity. What is evident from these participants is that effective teachers' confirmed the 'worthiness' or 'worthwhileness' of community through the use of resources in its many interconnected manifestations – human, historical, and physical. The resource was not simply used as a means to engage students, but, moreso, as a means to affirm the community the resource represented. In the authors' experience, teachers' limited affirmation of the community as a resource (Lewthwaite et al., 2009) largely reinforces the lack of affiliation teachers have with both students and community and response to the imperative community members seek for schools to emphasize. What respondents suggested was not, simply, that the community be more involved in their students' learning, but, more importantly, that the school reciprocally confirm the participation of the community through students' learning. As asserted by Noddings:

When we confirm someone, we identify a better self and encourage its development. To do this we must know the other reasonably well. Otherwise we cannot see what the other is really striving for, what ideal he or she may long to make real. Formulas and slogans have no place in confirmation. We do not posit a single ideal for everyone and then announce 'high expectations for all'. Rather we recognize something admirable, or at least acceptable, struggling to emerge in each person and community we encounter. The goal or attribute must be seen as worthy both by the person trying to achieve it and by us. We do not confirm people or communities in ways we judge to be wrong (Noddings 1996, p. 192).

It is our belief that such acknowledgment by teachers is a political act, whether conscious or unconscious. Confirmation of community by teachers reveals their attention to and affiliation for the subordinated status of Indigenous peoples within the larger macrosystem of state and nation, and their awareness of the agency they have for students' sense of culturally-located self and in challenging this commonly experienced subordination.

#### *Theme Four: Student Voices: Students Are Supported in Negotiating the Literacy Demands of School*

Students' comments, in contrast to parents, commonly focused on teacher pedagogy, which were then subdivided into several categories. First and similar to parents' considerations, students identified a variety of ways in which they were supported in literacy learning, often within the context of other learning areas, especially mathematics.

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

*Before reading, she goes over the hard words and maybe has pictures that get you thinking [not just words]. Really slow. It helps to know what will be in [the reading] and what it means. It's like she knows what words will give you trouble. She doesn't make you feel stupid, just really supportive. When you are on your own [reading], I can't understand because it's just words. You maybe can read those words but not know [and comprehend]. That's why what she does really helps.*

*A good teacher explains really well. They don't make you figure it out for yourself. They help you with that. There will be lots of examples and you try it or see it in different ways. I like it when in maths you see lots of examples. That makes you feel more confident and then you try. I don't like it when you're left to do it yourself. It's never the same though. In Year 8 and 9 that was good and then in 10 it wasn't, now it's good. When it was bad, it was just words. Just words that didn't make sense. I had to see it.*

Drawing from the extensive research base which advocates for strategies for assisting students lacking literacy fluency (for example, Glynn et al., 2005), it was apparent many of these strategies were being advocated for by students. Students were aware they required in school a new way of relating to and using language, a long-standing assertion in the sociological literature (Bourdieu, 1990; Halliday & Martin, 1993). Students were being orientated by effective teachers to age-appropriate texts before reading and, then, reading strategies and writing were taught and repeatedly modelled in context so that words were connected with concrete phenomena. In addition, literacy was taught across the curriculum and visual images were commonly used to prompt conversation before textual reading (Yunkaporta, 2010). In all, effective teachers were enabling students' in their learning. Because of their awareness of students' limited language capital, they were able to draw upon students funds of knowledge and experience as a scaffold to high-status cultural capital accessible in school only through literacy (Lingard & Keddie, 2013). If teachers gave explicit attention to literacy acquisition strategies, student engagement and success was enhanced.

#### *Theme Five: Student Voices: Learning Intentions Are Made Clear Through a Dialogic Environment*

Pedagogical comments also pertained to the communication patterns of classrooms. Following on from Theme Four and as we have found in previous studies (Lewthwaite et al. 2007, 2010), the language patterns of classrooms were perceived to strongly influence student engagement and learning, and again often acted as a barrier for learning. Making clear the intended learning was very important to students (Yunkaporta, 2010). Clarity of speech and learning intent were seen as crucial for causing learning. The communication patterns were encouraged to be dialogical rather than univocal, voluntary rather than involuntary, both of which are inherent within Hattie's notion of making learning visible (2010). Listening, for both students and teachers, was seen as important as talking. Teachers' under-talking was preferred over their over-talking, especially in communicating complex ideas. Making provision for students to use home language in the classroom was viewed positively as a support for learning (Jorgensen et al., 2013).

*I like her teaching when she keeps the important information up front. Really to the point. I know our [Indigenous Education Support Worker] tells us that we need to be able to 'code-switch' in the class. Everything is 'code-switch' for us. Not just the way we talk but the way we are asked to learn and behave. She says if we can 'code-switch', we will be ok. Teachers talk in ways I'm not used to but that's what lots of teachers do need to be doing more. Help us to see the important stuff and then fill it in a bit – not too much we get lost. When we are learning it is good to be able to use [the language] we are used to. That is good when teachers can help us in the change [from home language to Standard Australian English].*

*I like it when the start of the lesson is clear. You know the focus and then at the end you come back to that. I need to know where I'm going so she makes that good. Just letting you know what you need to know and what to do, so it comes back to that.*

#### *Theme Six: Student Voices: Teaching is Differentiated to Accommodate Student Diversity*



Further pedagogical commentary pertained to how effective teachers accommodated rather than assimilated students in classrooms, especially in the learning. Evident in their comments was evidence of classrooms operating under guiding principles rather than imposed and restrictive rules. Students made mention of the importance of high expectations being encouraged for classroom behaviour and student performance, especially in terms that allowed everyone to engage in learning. Especially important was an organisational structure at the classroom level that provided time, opportunity and support for students to learn and show learning. Also, working for learning allowed for assistance and feedback from peers, inferring the desire for a classroom grounded on learning reciprocally, especially through student pairing. As described by students:

*You pick up on whether the teacher places importance on me learning. In some classes, if you are left behind, that's tough. In [a class] everyone is expected to learn and not stop others for learning. Everyone wants to know where they stand and that everyone is equal. No favourites. Not just the person that gets it, or the ones that don't get it. There has to be a message that each student's learning is important. That we can help each other - I help her. She helps me.*

*Right from the beginning I knew this year was going to be good. She makes it clear by what she says and what she does that each student's learning is important. You could see it right away. I knew her expectations had to do with her believing in us. That's what I want - teachers that believe in me.*

These comments are consistent with Berger's (2007) reflections about teacher expectations and positive learning environments for Indigenous settings. He suggests that a warm and caring environment where a teacher is seen as part of 'the team' and maintains high expectations for all students and takes into consideration their diversity and how this will be accommodated, is essential for supporting learning. Establishing classrooms on the principle of warm expectation and reciprocity is commonly cited in the Indigenous education literature (Hudsmith 1992; Osborne, 1996).

#### *Theme Seven: Students' Voices: A Variety of Practices for Causing Learning*

More generally, a variety of pedagogic practices influencing learning dominated students' responses, especially in response to the question, "If you have a new teacher next year, what do you want her to do to help you in your learning?"

*I think I am doing much better this year, already. He makes things really clear. I know at the start of each lesson what we are doing. He shows [it] really carefully. There are lots of examples [in the instruction] and [for me] not too fast. I get time to think and practice. If I need help I can get help. At the end of the lesson, he lets us know how we did. I'm not that confident and that really helps.*

*I only liked geography because he made it really relevant. It had to do with the Mt Isa area and he reminded us of what the areas were [maybe using a map or a photograph]. We would learn difficult things but they related to our country here. I could relate to what he was saying...I thought that was important he took [the] time to find that out.*

These two commentaries provide some initial insights into practices commonly identified by students and, to a lesser extent, by some adults as contributors to learning. The mention of being 'talked to', or 'copying notes', or being 'alone' in learning and 'listening to learn' were the most

common negative references made by participants suggesting that hierarchical and univocal classrooms, although maybe well-disciplined or well-managed, were not perceived as favourable environments for learning. In all, students identified over 20 teacher practices that contributed to their learning, most of which are commonly cited in the effective teaching literature (Hattie, 2009). In good teaching practice, respondents mentioned that the learning intentions were made clear and that modelling and demonstrating were common. Visual images and other modalities other than text were commonly used to inform. Repetition and focus on mastery were emphasized. Time provision was made to gain mastery and process learning. Learning was assessed in a variety of ways, not just in written form. Learners were given personal and timely feedback to support next steps in learning. Collaboration and reciprocation amongst students and teacher in learning was seen as important. The teacher and students involved each other in a student's learning. It was seen as vital that students were receiving individual attention and given feedback and affirmation as they learned. Story-telling and the use of narratives focusing on relatable subjects were significant in promoting engagement and learning. Learning was not abstract; instead it was connected to students' lives and prior learning, in other words it was meaningful. It focused on knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and was located in local context and connected to students' lives. Learning was enriched through 'working to end' type projects that promoted independence and collaboration, creativity, perseverance, and self-evaluation of progress towards tangible end products. Literacy and numeracy development were emphasized explicitly in the learning. Developing fluency in these areas was seen as a priority for students who recognised the capital which rewarded success in schools. Respondents commonly mentioned their lack of symbolic fluency (working with letters and numbers) as an impediment to their progress in school, but also identified a high regard for achieving this fluency and teachers that gave explicit attention to the development of such fluency. Despite this high regard for symbolic fluency, what was learned was not to be at expense of students' cultural background. Instead effective teachers used this as a medium to engage students and support their learning.

Most of these practices voiced to us as researchers are prominent in previous studies (Lewthwaite et al., 2007, 2010; Osborne, 1996, 2001) and are commonly cited in the CRP literature (Bishop, 2003; Castagno and Brayboy, 2008) but are largely absent from the current effective teaching discourse. Students were clearly articulating the characteristics of effective teaching that allowed them to access and negotiate the norms of Australian schooling. As we have suggested previously (Lewthwaite et al., 2007, 2010), we believe many of these practices serve students in negotiating mainstream school transition; that is, they serve to support students in transitioning daily from students' home experience and familiar culture, thus encouraging continuity between home and the classroom. As well, many of these practices are commonly identified as effective in supporting learning in the mandated practices many northern Queensland schools are experiencing today, especially as advocated by the Explicit and Direct Instruction models. In contrast to these perceived prescriptive pedagogical frameworks, what is evident within these accounts was how learning needed to be personalised rather than uniform, advocating for a learner-centred approach grounded in the local context. Fostering a pedagogy of difference was built upon the imperative of securing conditions of trust, an aspect of teachers' work that is not made explicit or considered currently in the nation's narrative on effective teaching today.

#### *Theme Eight: Mechanisms are put in Place to Support and Monitor Student Behaviour*

Finally, and likely most significantly, students most commonly mentioned the importance of relationships and expectations being the cornerstones for positive student-teacher interactions and classroom environments. Students openly talked about 'non-learning' environments where teachers were reactive to student off task behaviours with little awareness of the importance of establishing positive relationships as the foundation for constructive learning environments for the development of individuals, socially, intellectually and culturally.

*It's more about what she's like. You go into her class and you are going to work and learn. In another class you aren't going to work and learn [it is decided unconsciously by students before we get there]. She wants you to learn and you think she is working with you to help you to learn. There's no interruptions, because we know she's working with us. The rules are clear. She teaches clear. Harder stuff for some, easier for others. No one gets frustrated. You want to do your best. She takes her time. Lots of support. She's really nice. Yes, she can be mad but it's when we aren't doing our part. That's what she says. She's working hard to do her part and expects us to do ours. Makes it clear. Talks to you well, like a person. If you're not doing it, she just does it quietly. I don't like it when there's someone being told off. It's usually [in classes] where [the students] don't think [the teacher] cares. You don't matter. She just expects a lot from us ..... she expects lots from herself, I guess. She's [a] new [teacher]. We do lots of different things [in each class]. Maybe from the book, or from the board, or an activity. Changes it up, but it all makes sense. Different ways of saying something [about the same idea]. She doesn't come across as the expert [like some teachers]. Much more like a real person, not a teacher.*

*He's straight up. He's there to help and if you muck around, you're going to lose out. I like that because you know where you stand. In other classes you are made to feel you're not really worth the teacher's time. I know the story. It's like I'll give up. You don't get away with not doing well. It would be easy to just to say, well he's not going to do well, but he's clear everyone should be giving their best effort. He's on you but in a good way. I like it when you know that they are really interested in how you are going. Not just let you to do poorly. We talk about that. He's a good sort. Some are friendly but he is too, but more really interested in how you are going [in all parts of your life]. I got a test back and he said I should have done better and I let myself down by not studying. Most wouldn't do that. You have to work in his class...He says that...You know what you will doing that day and what you have to learn. It's good when you know that.*

Participants asserted that the formal curriculum learning experience was underscored by a strong relational foundation which was the predetermining influence on learning, again an attribute silenced within the current national discourse on teacher effectiveness. Effective teachers were not identified as knowledge experts; instead they proactively sought through genuine respectful relationships the development of personal attributes beyond academic achievement, especially students' self-beliefs about themselves as learners and culturally located individuals (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2010). The acknowledgment of this affective and likely unquantifiable dimension was unequivocally implied to be the foundation for current and future learning success.

*I don't feel like I'm different in my class because of my complexion [skin colour]. But I do feel like I am different. He wants the best for everyone, but I know he wants me to do well [as an Aboriginal male]. I want to too. I think he just has that extra [belief in me] because you can sometimes think no one cares. I know others care, but he makes it clear. I think that's good. I like it that way. We talked about next year and he knows what I want to do and I felt there was just that extra support [for me as an Aboriginal male].*

## **Framework for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

In the section that follows, we illustrate the categories of thought that members of the Catholic Education Aboriginal community identified as representative of a responsive pedagogy of difference for its members. It is important to note that this illustration represents, primarily, low-inference behaviours that would typically be easy to observe in a teacher’s practice. In all, the behaviours not only refer to what is taught but, also and more importantly, how the teaching unfolds and the priorities in learning. At the heart of this illustration and constantly asserted by students and parents is the importance of a teacher’s beliefs and understandings about their students and the community they represent. These effective practices occur because teachers accept that they are the central players in fostering change, first in themselves by altering their beliefs about students and the cultures they represent and, then, working collaboratively towards an environment where practices acknowledge the cultural capital which students possess and the culture of schools students are trying to negotiate.

In Table 1, we provide detailed description of these characteristics based upon the themes identified through the conversations with students and the community they represent, acknowledging that all aspects represented are not explicitly addressed in the narrative vignettes provided in the previous sections. We state these characteristics as questions as a prompt for reflection, taking into consideration that many readers of this paper are likely practicing teachers or pre-service teachers. All characteristics are consistently mentioned by community members as attributes of teachers of consequence and, we have found, commonly identified as practices influencing students’ learning in ongoing research in northern Canadian settings (Lewthwaite et al. 2007, 2010), Aotearoa-New Zealand (Bishop et al. 2012) and prior research in the Torres Strait context (Osborne, 1993, 1996, 2001). What we also wish to make note of is how community members identified that these characteristics of effective teachers are currently *commonly* being experienced in the Catholic Education Diocese, suggesting to us that the attribute of care claimed in the mandate of Catholic Education is being realised in current practice.

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

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

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

## Seeking a Pedagogy of Difference

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

A question that arises from this study is the uniqueness of these teacher attributes for Aboriginal learners. Are they not, simply, good teaching practices for all students? What provides significant credibility to these behaviours identified by Aboriginal and community members is that most of these attributes are identified as highly effective teaching practices in Hattie's meta-analysis (Hattie, 2009). As well, several correspond with the emphases made in the Explicit Instruction model

(Archer & Hughes, 2011) currently privileged in the North Queensland context. We see the importance of practices such as succinct explicit instruction, modelling, and proximity and feedback during learning as characteristic of the teaching and learning practices advocated for by the community and 'normalized' teaching practices for the Catholic Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. In Hattie's (2009) identification of the most significant influences for advancing student learning, he lists teacher practices such as the provision of feedback, clear direct instruction and instructional quality as some of the most significant influences on learning. Participant's comments represented many of the categories of practice identified by Hattie (2009). Although we saw correspondence between what the community was saying and the effective teaching literature on attributes influencing learning, we could see many influences were specific to 'place' emphasizing the context-specific nature of effective teaching in northern settings, especially in respect to this location's and peoples' socio-linguistic-political histories. Although the attributes of effective teachers and teaching identified by participants are evidently linked to many attributes of effective teachers identified in the mainstream literature, what is most apparently missing in this literature is any explicit mention of pedagogies that respond to the cultural norms and histories of the settings students represent. For example, the frequent mention of the need for establishing trust, providing prolonged wait time for learners to process ideas and be afforded opportunity for response, and reducing teacher talk, we saw as contextually embedded teaching practices. Several of the effective teaching practices identified within this study (e.g., succinct communication patterns, use of local resources and contexts), we believe, are manifest in students' home and community culture. Effective teachers were unconsciously or consciously mediating this discontinuity assisting students in their transition.

Beyond this is quite apparently a dimension that is silent and likely seen as a 'soft measure' in the national discourse on effective teaching – the power of relationship grounding in an ethic of care (Noddings, 2002). As Noddings asserts, we undervalue care, especially agentic care that exhorts, admonishes, challenges, fails to compromise and rises above uniformity and apathy. This is tragically absent in a national discourse that fails to be cognizant of Indigenous students as culturally, socially and politically located individuals. This is also the potential relationship between culturally responsive and effective teachers. Culturally responsive teachers are effective teachers by responding with agency to the cultural norms of the settings students represent. They are able to use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of students as a lens for reconsidering their teaching and role as a teacher to make learning encounters more relevant to, effective and consequential (Gay, 2000; Perso, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2010). It is apparent from participant commentary that of utmost importance in this study is the awareness of the destructive influence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history with education and its influence on students today. Parents foresee their children's future with education with cautious optimism understanding the tenuous position their children hold with teachers and schools. They recognize, through their own inter-generational experience, that teachers and schools likely privilege and unconsciously discriminate. Consequently, a learner's status can be compromised by a teacher's beliefs, something they seek ameliorated in entrusting their children to Catholic Education.

This draws attention to what is likely most meaningfully absent from the dimensions of the current reductionist discourse on effective teaching practice. There is no attention to how attitudinal dispositions and beliefs of teachers becomes manifest in low inference, easily observable teacher behaviours. In other words, if we have beliefs about a student, we are likely to display that belief in some tangible way (Trouw, 1997). In this study, participants give indication of a conscious awareness of how teachers' beliefs become manifest in their actions. As examples, respondents made mention of how much time [Aboriginal] students were given [or not] in assistance in learning, how engaged teachers were [or not] in their learning, whether high expectations [or not] were communicated for their learning and if local contextual information or people [or not] were used as resources in the learning process. Inferred from these experiences by many respondents was that it is

common for teachers to hold a deficit view of students or the community they represent. This perceived pathologizing (Shields et al., 2005) of students, the families and the cultures they represent immediately influences the quality of teachers' relationships with students and instructional practices. Parents and students show an astute awareness of the influence teachers have in enabling or disabling students' learning. If teachers regard students and the cultures they represent from an asset perspective, they typically show agency in responding to students and positively influence their learning (Valencia, 1997). Rather than attributing blame on family and community, they recognize they can bring about change by adjusting their practices. Inherent within the thinking of teachers of difference as indicated by the respondents in this paper, is that they respond to and adjust their practices based upon individuality, irrespective of cultural background. The identification of this pedagogy of difference for both students and parents is determined immediately in the initial interactions [or not] between students and their parents and teachers.

### Summary

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

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

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

culture in its many manifestations, especially its history and how history perpetuates and manifests in the student-teacher interface in classrooms today. It is in this interpersonal space that education changes or remains disturbingly the same for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their parents and communities today.

## Footnotes

[1] : Although the Australian Research Grant supporting this research is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (collectively for this paper referred to as Indigenous) students and community members, this research paper pertains to Aboriginal students and parents only because voluntary participation included only this population).

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