

Indigenous Literacies: A Literature Review

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Indigenous Literacies

1. Introduction

This Literature Review has been commissioned by the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne. It is concerned with two main areas; Teacher Knowledge and the Development of Indigenous Pedagogies. Key questions the review addresses are:

- *What knowledge about Indigenous cultures and histories and non-Indigenous histories do teachers need?*
- *What knowledge about Aboriginal English and Aboriginal literacies do non-Indigenous teachers need?*
- *What knowledge do non-Indigenous teachers need about Indigenous Pedagogies and Learning Styles?*
- *What are some examples of pedagogies in relation to literacy for Indigenous students?*

The literature is drawn from a wide range of work from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. This review seeks to present some of the major debates and discussion occurring/have occurred in the field of education. Included in this review is a set of broad issues for discussion that have been drawn from the literature. Additionally, there is an annotated bibliography that contains a range of resources that will provide further reading.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Teacher Knowledge

2.1.1. Knowledge about culture

What knowledge about Indigenous cultures and histories and non-Indigenous histories do teachers need to effectively teach Indigenous students?

There exists a broad range of literature that addresses this complex issue. In general, it is widely accepted that Indigenous students work well with teachers who not only respect, but understand their culture. Delpit claims, "If we do not have some knowledge of children's lives outside the realms of paper-and-pencil work, and even outside their classrooms, then we cannot know their strengths" (1995, p. 173). It is necessary "to really see, to really know the students we must teach" (Delpit, 1995, p.183). *Really 'seeing' and knowing students means understanding how their out-of-school lives shape them as*

learners and how their schooling experiences shape who they are out-of-school.

According to Johnson and Mancer, teachers must acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous students' experiences and use culturally relevant resources in order to gain respect from them (2001, p24). Understanding Indigenous cultures means understanding culture as multiple. Indigenous culture is not homogenous, fixed, constant and easily described. No culture is homogenous or singular – cultures change, are fluid and multiple. "Cultures are understood differently at different times by individuals who cross cultural boundaries and belong to and identify with different aspects of particular cultures at different times" (Santoro and Reid 2006 p.296). Stewart reminds us, "...the concept of Aboriginality for Aboriginal people is embedded with complexity and contradiction" (2002, p. 14). "The consequences of removal and assimilation have impacted significantly on Aboriginal identity, and this is especially traceable to the period in our history when the only way forward was seen to be a White one - a belief that still persists in certain areas" (AUSEINET, 2005). Fredericks (2002) argues that, for many Indigenous people, the process of identification as 'Aboriginal', with just one particular social group, is complicated inexorably by history:

Aboriginal people live in the contemporary world and weave in and out of two, three and even more cultural domains. We are part of colonisation, just as it is part of us. Aboriginal culture has needed to adapt, adjust and modify itself in order to survive within the contemporary world. This does not mean that our cultures are not, and that we are not, Aboriginal. You might have to look and listen more closely, but culture is always there in some form, always was and always will be (Fredricks, 2002).

Smith *et al* (2002) discuss the effectiveness of culturally specific professional development in informing non-Indigenous teachers of the experiences and events of the past from an Indigenous perspective. A program titled 'Changing Places' was developed in Tasmania, relied heavily on the involvement of parents and other members of the local Indigenous community and aimed to teach teachers about the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories. Practical activities were used to allow for physical and visual learning.

One particular example in the Professional Development suggestions is an activity titled '*From Gumnuts to Buttons*' (Smith *et al*, 2002, p38). In this activity, a large map of Tasmania is placed on the floor. The teachers are divided into 9 different groups with one Indigenous leader teaching each group about the language and culture of the group they represent. Teachers draw visual representations of the stories they are told and place these over the outline map of Tasmania. An elder then places gumnuts in these particular sections to represent the Indigenous peoples living in these regions. The arrival of European settlers is represented by buttons. Gumnuts are removed from various locations as buttons replace them. As the land is lost by

Indigenous people, more buttons take over the map and the visual representations of Indigenous land are diminished. Eventually, the last few gumnuts remaining on the map are removed to Flinders Island. The final step of the activity is to place some of the gumnuts in 12 locations around Tasmania, which represent the land returned to Indigenous communities in Oyster Bay (Smith *et al*, 2002, p38).

Another example of a cultural resource for teachers, which can be used in a variety of disciplines, is the *Deadly Vibe* magazine. Purdie and Stone (2005) discuss the impact of the magazine on students' self esteem and their commitment to reading. *Deadly Vibe* is dedicated to stories about Indigenous people succeeding in their chosen field of interest or work and aims to provide young Indigenous people with a text that they can be inspired by and learn from (Purdie and Stone, 2005, p27). The reference to Indigenous role models is what makes *Deadly Vibe* a unique publication – young Indigenous people respect the source of information and want to know more.

Deadly Vibe uses language that is appealing and easily accessible to most young people. For example, the excerpt below was from the online website version of the magazine.

Got a hankering for some bush tucker? A new food and travel show hosted by Aboriginal chef Mark (the Black) Olive on the Lifestyle Channel, *The Outback Café*, is serving up traditional Aboriginal cuisine – 2006 style. You'll find some great ideas for your next dinner party, plus Mark's special recipe for a delicious yabbie salad.¹

Although the need for non-Indigenous teachers to understand the cultures of their Indigenous students in clear, greater recognition of the contribution of Indigenous teachers to the education of Indigenous students, is required. While it is Indigenous teachers who best understand Indigenous cultures and communities, they remain grossly under-represented in the Australian teaching profession despite ongoing calls since the 1970s for a growth in the number of Indigenous teachers to ensure a teacher/student ratio comparable to the non-Indigenous student/teacher ratio (Collins, 2000; Hughes and Willmot, 1982; Commonwealth of Australia, 1993; Queensland Dept. of Education, 1992; VAEAI, 2001). According to Herbert, "Indigenous teachers remain almost invisible within our educational institutions across all sectors of education" (2002, p. 2).

Non-Indigenous teachers also need to recognise the impact of history on Indigenous parents' relationships with schooling systems. Many Indigenous parents have had negative experiences within Australian schooling systems and may be hesitant to approach the school or become actively involved in their children's school education. Teachers must take this into consideration

¹ <http://www.vibe.com.au/vibe/corporate/index.asp>, Accessed 17 August 2006

when developing relationships with parents, rather than assume that Indigenous parents do not want to become involved in school concerns (Johnson and Mancer, 2001, p24).

While it has been long recognised that teachers need to understand and respect Indigenous students' cultures, most pre-service teachers remain inadequately prepared to work with Indigenous students. They finish education degrees having developed insufficient, or in some circumstances, inaccurate knowledge about Indigenous students' values, beliefs and cultures (Reid and Santoro, 2006). In particular, they have little understanding of how the teaching practices of an overwhelmingly mono-cultural and monolingual teaching profession privilege the dominant white majority in ways that are simply taken for granted (Santoro and Allard 2005, Santoro et al. 2001). Despite several decades of policy objectives to pluralise Australian education (McConaghy 2000), being white in Australia is still constructed in curriculum and cultural practices as normal and natural (Burney 1996). Goldstein argues, "Most white teachers have not been taught to see themselves as white. Nor have we been taught to think of whiteness as being important to our work in racially diverse classrooms" (2001, p. 4). Partington (2003) asserts that most teachers are ignorant of Indigenous histories and their intersections with non-Indigenous histories. Such ignorance is likely to lead to pedagogies that are inappropriate and that compound the failure of white educational systems in Australia to address the needs of Indigenous students.

2.1.2 Knowledge about language and literacy

What knowledge about Aboriginal English and Indigenous literacies do teachers need?

Many Indigenous students often do not speak Standard Australian English (SAE) at home, but speak Aboriginal English. According to Rose,

Various types of 'Aboriginal English' are spoken in all Indigenous communities in Australia, whether the variety is classified by linguists as a 'creole', a 'pidgin' or a 'non-standard English'. In each of these varieties the lexical 'content' words tend to be mainly English, but grammatical structures may be hybrids of English and Indigenous grammar structures, and English grammatical items such as prepositions, reference items, relational verbs, or auxiliary verbs of tense and modality may be absent or transformed. Despite these structural differences, there is no question that the meaning potential of these Indigenous varieties is just as functional for spoken communication as are other dialects of English spoken by other speech communities (Rose 1999, p.10).

If teachers do not regard Aboriginal English as a valid language form there is the risk that they will assume that these students have language deficits or speech impediments that require intervention or remediation (Clancy and Simpson, 2002, p59). Malcolm (2003) suggests that a teacher's attitude towards language varieties has a significant impact on how well they engage with learners. When students feel that a teacher values languages other than Standard Australian English, they are more likely to feel positive about school and to be more fully engaged in learning. (Malcolm, 2003, p12) Teachers should become familiar with the patterns and processes of the home languages of Indigenous students, so that they can more easily make explicit, connections to Standard Australian English (Malcolm, 2003, p14).

Discussions about literacy education for Indigenous children often concentrate on the school environment as *the* means to engage students in the learning process. However, the literacies that Indigenous students bring to school are shaped by their cultural experiences at home and in the community. Much literature suggests that Indigenous communities use oral teachings to increase children's knowledge of their past and present cultures as well as their place in the family and community. Stories are told by family members and elders and passed down to younger people through speaking. For example, in a rural community, Indigenous children may learn about animals through listening to the stories of their elders, following them while gathering food and experiencing the process for themselves. – Indigenous children may be more practiced in learning through listening, seeing and doing than by reading and writing. Fler (2001) argues that this practice of listening and experiencing, develops particular types of literacies such as reading animal tracks and the environment for example. Schools need to understand what cultural knowledges their students bring to school to and use this knowledge to build connections to school curriculum.

Fler (2001) argues that because Indigenous children often have well developed literacies around listening and speaking, they often struggle to connect with the English grammar skills taught in school. This is due, in part, to such skills being taught via reading and writing. Additionally, grammar is often taught out of context, which is problematic for many Indigenous learners who prefer in-context, experiential learning. According to Shopen and Hickey, Indigenous students learn grammar better when the teacher has used social and personal situations that demonstrate the appropriate use of grammar in context (2003, p27). Explicit connections need to be made between school literacies and home literacies. Without such connections, the literacies of school can seem meaningless to Indigenous students.

According to Rose, much literacy teaching involves pedagogies that are 'invisible' and not explicit.

Indigenous students in particular are excluded by invisible pedagogies from accessing school discourses. The discursive experience that most young Indigenous children bring to school does not include the same orientation to decontextualised

meanings that middle class western families inculcate (Rose, 1999, p. 8).

As already mentioned, many teachers of Indigenous students fail to fully understand the nature of the linguistic differences between the language spoken in the home and that which is used in the classroom. It is common for teachers to assume that Indigenous 'difference' is purely a cultural one. They can mistakenly subscribe to stereotypes constructed by Culturalism. Lamb *et al* (2002) explain that Culturalism 'others' Indigenous people by assuming that any difference, whether it is social policy, education or literacy, is primarily cultural. Such an assumption means that the impact of other factors are neglected.

Nakata (2003) continues with this argument and suggests that teachers can observe and note students' cultural differences, then neglect the development of the skills that contradict those differences (p10). He argues that teachers should not neglect Indigenous students' literacy development out of 'misplaced' cultural sensitivity because ultimately, to survive and succeed, Indigenous children need to learn how to perform tasks that may be outside of their comfort zone (Nakata, 2003, p10). Indigenous families hold high expectations that their children will become proficient in the use of English and develop literacies that are of a level comparable to those of their non-Indigenous peers.

Similarly, Rose suggests that the difficulties Indigenous children have in regards to writing

...can no longer be blamed on cultural differences or unfamiliarity with 'western' teaching methods, since these have been a significant part of their cultural experience throughout childhood. Rather, to understand the problem and identify effective approaches, we need to look squarely at the nature of the literacy methodologies they have been experiencing all this time. These methodologies usually include progressivist approaches to writing and in many schools include writing in local vernacular languages. Both models share similar assumptions about the nature of linguistic and cultural competence (Rose 1999, p. 15).

Shepherd (2003) supports the contention that teachers are often limited in their understanding about their Indigenous students' differences and difficulties in the classroom. She suggests that the successful teaching of literacy to Indigenous students could occur if home languages are accepted and valued. She goes on to suggest access to English literacies should be through their first language. The method to achieving this access, according to Shepherd (2003), is to teach Indigenous students within an ESL (English as a Second Language) framework.

... it is about recognising and valuing the first language. It is about putting special programs into place to assist the teachers to teach the students and assist the learners in meeting outcomes in English (Shepherd, 2003, p74).

Taylor (2002) claims that teachers need to recognise Indigenous students as 'Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students. Teaching them using second language learning pedagogies will improve their success in English literacy (Taylor, 2002, p45).

Zeeger *et al* (2003) assert that it is problematic for teachers to equate Indigenous students' literacy development with their English language development. These authors suggest that teachers need to recognise Indigenous students' literacies in their mother tongue and use this knowledge base to develop literacy in Standard Australian English (Zeeger *et al*, 2003, p55). Zeeger *et al* (2003) suggests that teachers working with Indigenous students should have some level of training in English as a Second Language (ESL).

Malcolm and Rochecouste (2003) argue that rather than considering all Indigenous students as of Non-English Speaking Background, it is more important to consider the cultural conflict and tensions that arise in the translation from Aboriginal English to Standard Australian English (SAE). Many students have the linguistic skills in Aboriginal English, but not SAE and their ability to switch between the different linguistic codes restricts their engagement with learning.

Indigenous students have a preference for listening and observing as a mode of learning rather than reading and often find that writing is not the most adequate means for expression (Malcolm and Rochecouste, 2003, p20). Learning activities and assessment tasks that allow for other modes of expression, such as painting, singing, acting or drawing, should be given priority within literacy programs. Where teachers give students the opportunity to develop literacy across these different modes of communication, Indigenous students are likely to be more engaged because they can more easily transfer their own linguistic skills to the SAE codes.

Shopen and Hickey (2003), in their coordination and study of an English professional development program, 'How English Works', discovered many teachers do not have a clear understanding of the linguistic structures of English. In their observation of teachers attending the professional development workshops, Shopen and Hickey identified a central flaw in the teaching strategies used to teach English grammar to Indigenous students. They comment that "teachers typically think of grammar as punctuation or out-of-context grammar lessons which focus on the elements of structure and the parsing of sentences" (p27). This approach leads to disengagement of Indigenous students, who learn grammar best when it is taught in-context, preferably in a visual, experiential way (Shopen & Hickey, 2003, p25).

An effective method to engage Indigenous students in English grammar development involves activities that are participatory in nature and involve connecting sounds and images with words (Shopen and Hickey, 2003, p28). The scenarios used to identify different grammatical rules lend themselves to visual, interactive displays. Indigenous students may engage more successfully with a picture, than with a sentence (Shopen and Hickey, 2003, p28). Rose argues the need for

an approach to language pedagogy that makes the realisations of decontextualised discourses visible to Indigenous children. These realisations include both the language features of written texts they are engaging with, and the patterns of teacher-learner interaction around these language features. In other words, teachers need to design learning activities that will enable children to develop an elaborated orientation to discourse; they need to be clear about how the procedures of each learning activity will enable children to meet these goals, and they need to make these procedures visible to the children. In order to do this teachers need to be able to analyse, both the cultural and linguistic competences that children bring to a learning task, and the cultural and linguistic features of the texts and interactions they will learn to engage with (Rose 1999, p.9.)

Several articles discussing Indigenous literacy have focused on the fact that literacy is not only about reading and writing. The notion of 'multiliteracies' informs an approach to teaching literacy that focuses on understanding the variability of meaning making in different cultural, social or professional contexts as well as learning the nature of new communications technologies. Multiliteracies develops the understandings among students that language is not as simple as the written or spoken word, rather it is about making meanings and appreciating their application in the past, present and future. Smith *et al* (2002) suggest that this approach is suitable for Indigenous students because it uses a variety of media and material, encouraging them to make new connections in their learning.

Rawolle and Mayer (2002) discuss the general movement in the education system in Queensland and other states towards a more skills-based education. Schooling is no longer about giving students content and knowledge, but giving them skills to assist them in their continued learning throughout life. Rawolle and Mayer (2002) suggest that the technological language of the internet and computers is a literacy that is central to surviving in the current society. However, despite the rhetoric of multiliteracies, the importance of "book knowledge" strongly remains the focus of school literacy while oral literacies are less significant (van Broekhuizen, 2000, p1).

2.1.3 Indigenous Pedagogies and Learning Styles.

What knowledge do non-Indigenous teachers need about Indigenous Pedagogies and Learning Styles?

The notion of Indigenous Learning Styles is extremely contentious. Although, taking specific examples of cultural learning tendencies and “applying them as general cultural traits across the diversity of Australian Indigenous peoples and their life experiences in differing social, economic and geographical situations” (Stewart, 2002, pp15-16) is potentially problematic, there is a significant body of literature that supports the notion that there is a binary divide between how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people learn and how they understand knowledge and the nature of learning. According to Morgan and Slade for example (1998), Aboriginal people in general, regard effective learning as contextual/interdependent, participatory and that learners are motivated by community commitment and obligation. They regard truth as subjective and relative and knowledge as owned and exchanged on the basis of right and responsibilities. In contrast, for non-Aboriginals, learning tends to be fragmented and theoretical. They are motivated by personal ambition, truth is absolute, and knowledge is a commodity (Morgan and Slade, 1998, p.9).

Work by Santoro and Reid (2006) and Reid and Santoro (2006)² that explored the experiences of Indigenous teachers suggests that Indigenous teachers’ pedagogies are strongly influenced by their own experiences as learners and their knowledge about the informal and experiential learning and teaching that occurs between children, parents and elders in Indigenous communities. For example, in an excerpt of interview data, one of their interviewees, Deb, suggests that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of teaching are binary opposites. She claims her classroom practices, characterised by a ‘hands-on’ approach to teaching and learning that prioritises ‘doing’, addresses the needs of Indigenous learners.

Deb: *I just felt that I was different [from the other teachers], I didn't sort of think in the same kinds of ways and didn't view the kids in the same way. My style of teaching, in reflection, my style of teaching was probably teaching the way Aboriginal people teach. Not the way conventional teaching and learning happens. [...] We would do lots of hands on ...and then the paper and pen stuff would come after concepts were well and truly understood. By not forcing them to pen and paper too early, it gave them that time to work it out for themselves.*

Interviewer: *Was that approach something that was covered in your teacher education course?*

Deb: *No. It was just something that I did. I pulled from my own experiences some of the things that I have learnt.*

² Based on an ARC project ‘Indigenous Teachers: Understanding their experiences and career pathways’ (with Laurie Crawford, Cathryn McConaghy and Lee Simpson).

Another of Santoro and Reid's interviewees, Cathy also describes Aboriginal learning styles as focused on 'doing', seeing, touching and exploring.

I think the way the Koori people learn is you know it's about the touching and the feeling and the you know, exploration [...] Whereas western teaching and learning is very compartmentalised. It's very boxed and it has to fit into this. Because if it doesn't, it's not part of it. It sits out here, and that's where we sit. We sit out here because we don't fit into a box. We're surrounding the box. We're part of the box. We're inside the box. We're all over the box. We're like the air, we're all around ... White teachers don't see that.

Here, Cathy describes Western views of knowledge, learning and teaching as compartmentalised, discrete and bounded and in direct contrast to how Aboriginal learners regard knowledge and learning as de-compartmentalised and fluid. She suggests that these differences mean that Indigenous people "sit outside" and do not "fit into" the ideologies and practices of 'boxed' 'mainstream' schooling systems. Her claim that White teachers don't understand how Indigenous learners learn is echoed throughout the Indigenous teacher interview data (see Santoro and Reid, 2006; Reid and Santoro, 2006; Santoro, in press).

Clancy and Simpson (2002) comment on another dimension of knowledge that teachers need to develop when working with Indigenous students. While language differences are one aspect, Indigenous students are often troubled by the actual daily procedures and expectations of schooling. For example, within their family setting, when children are asked to complete a task, the expectation is that they complete the task, regardless of the time taken to do so. However, in the school setting, the amount of time taken to complete a task can override how well the task was completed. Behavioural issues can result through the student's frustration that they were unable to complete the task in the given time (Clancy and Simpson, 2002, p60).

Because many Indigenous families rely on oral tradition through which to teach younger generations (Galloway, 2003, p25), and Indigenous children often grow up in environments that focus on family relationships and spatial knowledge, the use of written instruction and the privileging of formal literacies in classrooms is modelled on a Non-Indigenous cultural learning environment (Galloway, 2003, p27). The 'foreignness' of white classroom culture leads to Indigenous students feeling 'outsiders' and not involved in the processes that shape them as learners. Creating feelings of connectedness is a significant challenge for teachers working with Indigenous children. Concentrating learning around an issue or physical area of concern and care for the students is necessary in order to successfully engage them (Smith *et al*, 2002, p39). Smith *et al* (2002) comment on the success of a learning program in a Tasmanian primary school, where students wanted to develop a Frogger in the courtyard, but did not have the knowledge or skills to achieve this. The

teachers used the students' initial motivation to develop lessons and activities that focused on hands-on learning and allowed the students to learn more about frogs from a perspective that was meaningful to the students themselves. Smith *et al* (2002) strongly believe that for Indigenous students to feel connected to literacy, they need to be learning about something they care about.

In general, the culture and practices of Australian classrooms are based on non-Indigenous concepts of communication. For example, direct questioning between teachers and students and students and students is often the backbone of learning and communication. However, Indigenous students have grown up in a different culture of communication and have often been restricted in regards to with whom and how they should speak. Direct questioning, to some Indigenous people, is considered to be rude and an inappropriate method of gaining information and knowledge (Crozet, 2001, p4). Indigenous people are often indirect in dealing with others, particularly in situations when someone wants/needs something from another person. In Non-Indigenous cultures, it is generally acceptable to simply ask a direct question. However, Indigenous cultures will indirectly hint at the matter of concern and wait for the other person to share their own information. Teachers should consider this when working with Indigenous students – allow the students to willingly share their knowledge, rather than demand responses through direct questioning.

Shopen and Hickey (2003) state that grammar taught through speaking and repetition, and then supported by writing will assist Indigenous students to make connections. Oral language development allows students to link sounds to words and supports improvement in both reading and writing (Shopen & Hickey, 2003, p29). Shopen and Hickey (2003) conclude that grammar needs to be taught through “practice-oriented activities” to engage and motivate Indigenous students. Practice-oriented activities are likely to be interactive and will encourage students to identify parts of English grammar on the basis of what they are doing and seeing. This suits the literacies that they are familiar with – learning through observation and experience. For example, a conventional teaching method for the different parts of sentence could be to write the sentence on the board and highlight the different sections. However, this does not communicate to the students *how* the order works. A more suitable approach to the topic may be to allow roleplay and interaction. For example, the different parts of the sentence being focused on may be the *Number, Noun, Adjective, Verb and Phrase of Context*. An effective activity might be to give five students a card to hold up in front of the class; *15, Fish, Shiny, Swam, Into the Net*. The students in the audience have to reorder the students out the front until the words make sense within the sentence. The visual nature of the activity clearly demonstrates the parts, and the interaction of the students encourages understanding of the meaning of the words (Shopen and Hickey, 2003, p29). Similarly, Galloway (2003) also supports the contention that Indigenous students are best suited to learning grammar and language structures within oral expression prior to reading and writing.

Much literature also suggests that many Indigenous students would prefer to draw something, rather than write about it. Visual representations allow the communication of emotions and experiences, as well as facts and knowledge. This form of communication is more commonly developed at a young age in Indigenous communities. Allowing students to use these skills to demonstrate their understanding of a written text removes the risk of 'getting it wrong'. The students are able to convert the one form of literacy into a literacy that they are comfortable and familiar with. The consolidating step is to then to use this literacy to develop skills in a written form based on the student's analysis of what they have included in their visual interpretation. The use of a student's work to encourage learning and analysis of their own communication is invaluable to linguistic development across cultures.

2.2 Developing Indigenous Pedagogies

Several Government inquiries into Indigenous literacy and numeracy have discovered that Indigenous students have significantly lower achievement in these areas (Rawolle and Mayer, 2002, p41). The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy asserts that "every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level" (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000, p2). This goal has led to the development of several initiatives concentrating on improving Indigenous students' literacy outcomes.

Effective pedagogies are developed through communication between teachers, students, families and other community members. Bulliwana *et al* (2002) claim that *Both Ways Pedagogy* is the most suitable approach for schools teaching Indigenous students. It is an approach based on the inclusion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous priorities and theories in the development of curriculum and teaching plans. Communication and consultation between the school, its teachers and the families of students attending will provide for successful development of a *Both Ways* approach – allowing families to contribute their wishes for their children's development and allowing teachers and the school to express their aims for their students' education. Furthermore, Indigenous families have a unique insight to the literacies that their child has developed in the home and community prior to beginning school. Not all Indigenous students can be treated in the same way — they come from rich and diverse language backgrounds (Zeegers *et al*, 2003, p53) that shape them differently as learners. *Both Ways* emphasises the inclusion of both perspectives on an even-footing, meaning that the Indigenous students are gaining from the communication between those who know and understand their culture and language and those who are working to broaden their knowledge and skills.

Bayles (2001) supports the notion that the involvement of the Indigenous community in the teaching process, as well as the learning process, will contribute to improved attendance and success of Indigenous students.

Ownership is an important part of people accepting an institution – where there is Indigenous control and contribution to what happens in the school (Bayle, 2001, p25). The *Both Ways* approach ensures that the Indigenous community has a say in the direction and procedures of the school and is therefore able to claim a significant element of ownership of schooling processes.

Both Ways pedagogy requires meetings between teachers and community members to discuss and develop appropriate curricula. The Gunbalanya Community Education Centre in Arnhem Land has provided for this *Both Ways* communication to take place. Participants likened curriculum to a whirlpool – whereby ideas and aims for education circle around a central ambition and draw its objective to the whirlpool's centre. The whirlpool analogy of teaching is characterised by an integrated curriculum approach, with the curriculum is designed around essential questions, expressive thought and reflective thinking (Bulliwana, 2002, p6).

Indigenous students work well under curriculum that has been developed with a thematic approach. Themes or 'Big Questions' provide the basis for units of learning to take place – the relevance of these to the students can be assured because they have been developed with the contribution of community members. The *Both Ways* approach relies on Indigenous community members to guide teachers on the issues that concern students – allowing a familiar and passionate theme to be used to engage students in what would otherwise be foreign content. An example of the *Both Ways* approach to literacy is where students have read an article and their demonstration of understanding is displayed in two ways – a visual representation through artwork of their own culture and a written response based on this artwork using skills of the English language (Bulliwana, 2002, p7).

A significant influence on the achievement of Indigenous students is the adaptation of teaching strategies that take Indigenous students' differences into consideration (Partington, 2003). Teachers can be resistant to change, and if professional learning is not specific to their own daily duties, materials and information from professional development sessions are put to the side and never looked at again. Partington (2003) clearly states that teachers need to understand the context within which change is being implemented, in order for initiatives to improve Indigenous students' outcomes at a local level. Partington (2003) concludes that teachers need to feel a connection to the learning contexts described in professional development activities for new teaching strategies to be successful.

The Koori Centre is a department of the University of Sydney in New South Wales, which provides access to tertiary studies for Indigenous Australians. The students there have generally had past experiences of schooling that were painful and discouraging, though these students have made a commitment to come back and complete their studies. Rose *et al* (2003) discuss the impact of a history of educational neglect – whereby students are ill-prepared for the demands of formal, tertiary studies. Indigenous students often do not have the literacy or vocabulary to easily engage in the readings

and articles used in most tertiary learning environments. Hence, they become disengaged and often do not complete the course.

Researchers at the Koori Centre have developed a scaffolding methodology to assist Indigenous students engage with and make meaning from the texts they work with. The scaffolding methodology develops a student's confidence in reading through the use of a support-based pedagogy. Students are strongly supported by their teachers initially, then as the student becomes more competent, the scaffolding is withdrawn (Rose *et al*, 2003, p42). The methodology relies on the teacher modelling and explaining the task and its processes, while the student watches and listens. Then the student attempts the task with the support and constant guidance of the teacher (the teacher acts as scaffolding to the student's learning). Once the student becomes more confident and competent with the task, the teacher withdraws the intensive level of assistance in order to encourage the student to develop independence.

The Koori Centre reports that Indigenous students have demonstrated significantly improved understanding, interpretation and analysis of set readings for their tertiary courses (Rose *et al*, 2003, p47). The scaffolding program has provided students with a clear strategy and framework that allow them to approach their reading with increased confidence.

A scaffolding methodology was successfully implemented in primary schools in Alice Springs, as a way to encourage and support Indigenous students to achieve the expected potential for their year level (Cresswell *et al*, 2002, p5). Teachers have reported that students are more willing to take on the challenge of reading because they know that they will be supported. The impact of success in school for Indigenous children is significant – they are likely to want to keep coming to school if they know that they can feel good about themselves. In their ACER report, Cresswell *et al* (2002) report that the scaffolding literacy programme does work and makes a difference for Indigenous children in schools. It is a low cost and easily applicable methodology for improving students' engagement with texts (Cresswell *et al*, 2002, p22).

Rose's analysis of some examples of spoken texts from Aboriginal learners indicates that they are likely to; not use verbs in relational clauses, change reference items, use different tenses and organise their texts differently from non-Indigenous learners. He conducts this analysis in order to illuminate their literacy needs and discuss appropriate teaching strategies. He claims that "in order to engage successfully with the decontextualising forms of school discourse, they will tend to need explicit instruction in their purposes, texts and forms of interaction" (Rose, 1999 p.9). However, he also raises concerns about teachers' skills and "systematic knowledge of the language patterns they are teaching" (Rose, 1999, p. 14) due to "the withdrawal from teacher training in Australia, of both grammar and direct approaches to intervention in literacy learning" (Rose 1999, p.12). While approaches such as whole-language may be appropriate for some non-Indigenous learners who can cope with minimum teacher intervention in the writing process and do not

require the same degree of explicit teaching of language structures, “Indigenous whose home language(s) may differ from school English, are seriously disadvantaged by progressivist assumptions about pre-existing linguistic competences” (Rose, 1999, p.20).

3. Issues for Further Consideration

The following issues are drawn from the range of literature reviewed and are intended as a basis for discussion.

- Schools and teachers need to recognise that there is more than one type of literacy and that Indigenous children may be highly literate in literacies that are not necessarily valued or recognised by a ‘white’ education system.
- Teachers working with Indigenous students should have some level of training in English as a Second Language (ESL) and be familiar with ESL teaching strategies and pedagogies.
- More Indigenous teachers need to be recruited and retained in Australian schools.
- All teachers, both primary and secondary need to know how language works in order to develop skills in the explicit teaching of language structures, grammars and so on.
- In order to understand how the ‘whiteness’ of schooling shapes the learning experiences of Indigenous learners, in-service and pre-service teachers must develop understandings of non-Indigenous histories in relation to Indigenous histories.

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*This is a resource for teachers consisting of a video and accompanying booklet. It contains three sections. **Section One**, 'Policy and Strategy Contexts' outlines key national policies and the Catholic Education commission's policies in relation to Indigenous Education. **Section Two**, 'Learning Contexts' offers information about the cultural backgrounds of Indigenous students and establishes a need for a curriculum inclusive of Indigenous foci. **Section Three**, 'Professional Development Activities' offers a range of practical suggestions for teaching and learning activities in an Indigenous culturally-inclusive curriculum. It also advises on the selection of resources and the need for community consultation.*

Fleer, M. and Williams-Kennedy, D. (2002) *Building Bridges: Literacy Development in Young Indigenous Children*. Canberra: Early Childhood Association, Department of Education, Science and Training.

This is a kit consisting of a videocassette and handbook that provides a contextual overview of literacy education in the early years of schooling as well as practical suggestions for practice.

Fleer, M. and Williams-Kennedy, D. (2001) Looking in and not seeing yourself mirrored back: investigations of some Indigenous family views on education, *Curriculum Perspectives*, vol 21, no 3, pp52-55.

Abstract: *the influence of the cultural context and content on children's learning is discussed. Indigenous preschool-aged children and their families from different regions of Australia were invited to participate in a study which sought to identify learning experiences prior to school. Six pre-school-aged children were filmed by their families over the course of a week.*

Hughes, P., More, A. and Williams, M. (2004) *Aboriginal ways of Learning*. Canberra: Flinders Press.

This text is based on the Aboriginal ways of learning project (Abwol) carried out in 1996-2000 and aimed primarily at exploring Aboriginal ways of learning and developing field-tested teaching resources. The book consists of two main sections. The first contains a selection of learning units that have been drawn from the practices of teachers in South Australia who have been recognised as effective teachers of Aboriginal students. The description of each unit includes the school context, the tasks, activities and resources that make up the unit and the teacher's reflections about the unit. The second

section consists of a series of papers including discussions about Aboriginal pedagogies, and Aboriginal ways of learning.

IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team (2000) *What Works? Explorations of Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

This report is an analysis of the work and findings of nationwide projects focused on Indigenous education initiatives, site visits and workshops.

McConaghy, C. (2000) *Rethinking Indigenous Education. Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing*. Flaxton: PostPressed.

This book questions a number of core assumptions that shape Indigenous education and education reform in Australia such as colonial power relations, welfarism, assimilationism non-Indigenous epistemologies.

McKenery, R. (1996) *'Deadly eh, Cuz': Teaching Speakers of Koorie English*. Melbourne: Goulburn Valley Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

This teacher resource consists of a videotape, and audiotape and a booklet. It introduces teachers to the characteristics of Koorie English and how to work with students who speak Koorie English in the classroom. It includes interviews with teachers of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal themselves and showcases some of the initiatives taken in the Goulburn Valley in Victoria in terms of classroom practices.

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Abstract: *This article explores the failure of teacher education in Australia to prepare teachers to teach Indigenous students. Ignorance of Indigenous history, oppression, culture and expectations is likely to lead teachers to adopt strategies that compound the disadvantages Indigenous students experience and accelerate their departure from school. The article explores problems with schools, changing the perspectives of teachers, and what should be taught to student teachers.*

Purdie, N. and Stone, A. (2005) Deadly Vibe; Engaging Indigenous students at school, *Professional Development Teacher* April 2005, pp26 – 29.

The website for the magazine (<http://www.vibe.com.au/vibe/corporate/index.asp>) provides a very useful tool for teachers in the classroom. There are articles about sports, music and the arts that involve Indigenous people. The website provides downloadable, printable worksheets which allow students to practice their English comprehension, using a topic they are interested in.

The website provides teachers with activities specific to age/year level of the students. Also, these activities have been clearly designed to meet English standards within current curriculum frameworks.

Reid, J. and Santoro, N. (2006) Cinders in snow? Indigenous teacher identities in formation, *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34, (2), pp.143-160.

The identity work engaged in by Indigenous teachers in school settings is highlighted in a study of Australian Indigenous teachers. The construction of identity in home and community relationships intersects with and can counteract the take up of a preferred identity in the workplace. In this paper we analyse data from interviews with Indigenous teachers, exploring the interplay between culture and identity. We foreground the binary nature of racial assignment in schools, demonstrate how this offers contradictory constructions of identity for Indigenous teachers, and note the effects of history, culture and location in the process of forming a teaching 'self'.

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This book contextualises Henry Reynold's discovery of his Aboriginal heritage through an exploration of the history of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships in Australia from colonial times through to the 1990s.

Santoro, N. and Reid, J. (2006) 'All things to all people': Indigenous teachers in the Australian teaching profession. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 29. no.3 pp. 207 - 383.

This paper reports on the findings of a four-year study that seeks to understand the experiences and career pathways of Indigenous teachers in Australia. We present data obtained from in-depth interviews with current and former teachers in order to provide a qualitative account of what lies behind demographic trends in Indigenous teacher recruitment and retention in Australia. The paper highlights the expectations of school and wider communities that Indigenous teachers will be 'all things to all people' and will fill a number of complex and sometimes conflicting roles within and beyond classrooms. We speculate that these expectations contribute to their decisions to resign from the school system to work elsewhere. We also introduce and problematise the notion of 'The Indigenous Teacher' as a category in the consciousness of teachers, administrators and other participants in the discourses of Australian schooling.

We conclude by arguing the need for non-Indigenous student-teachers to be better prepared to work alongside Indigenous colleagues and to take more active roles in the implementation of policy and initiatives around Indigenous education. The paper also raises implications for the recruitment and retention of Indigenous teachers.

Stewart, J. (1999) The empowerment of Indigenous Australians in Mainstream Education. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, vol 27, no 2.

This article reports on strategies to empower Indigenous students that were implemented in NSW. The author is both a teacher and the coordinator of a project that will implement and monitor these strategies and initiatives over a three year period.