

2017

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Recommended Citation

Lewthwaite, B. E., Boon, H., Webber, T., & Laffin, G. (2017). Quality Teaching Practices as Reported by Aboriginal Parents, Students and their Teachers: Comparisons and Contrasts. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(12).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n12.5>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol42/iss12/5>

Quality Teaching Practices as Reported by Aboriginal Parents, Students and Their Teachers: Comparisons and Contrasts

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Abstract: This paper summarizes the findings from the first phase of a three-part project which, overall, investigates what Aboriginal¹ students perceive as the qualities and actions of effective teachers and subsequently seeks to determine the impact of the enactment of these identified qualities on educational outcomes. This first phase of the research was centered on gathering accounts of quality teachers and teaching practice from students, parents and their teachers from phenomenologically aligned interviews. Similar and contrasting themes among these three groups are presented, with the intention of exposing potential mismatch in perception of the construct of 'quality' teaching. Finally, we present implications of this research in light of the more recent development of professional standards for Australian teachers that seek to define and evaluate high quality teaching.

Introduction

Similar to many countries internationally, more recent educational policy developments in Australia draw attention to overt requirements within teacher education to prepare teachers as agents for removing exclusionary practices in their classrooms (Snee, 2011). These actions have been fuelled by data over the last decade from international evaluation assessments such as the Program for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2006, 2010, 2012) that draw attention to growing achievement disparity among and within the nation's states and territories (McGaw, 2006), especially between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Lingard & Keddie, 2013). In response, 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). As endorsed by The Melbourne Declaration (2008) this agreement is committed to ensuring learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students improve to match those of other students through a variety of actions.

In response to the Melbourne Declaration, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs), legislated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), is one action that draws specific attention to this imperative for inclusive practice. As stated by AITSL:

the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality (italics authors). Through the articulation of the APSTs, AITSL has "defined the work of teachers and make explicit elements

of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools that will improve educational outcomes for all students” (2014, p. 2).

The seven APSTs address attributes deemed essential to inclusive teaching as a central tenet of teacher and teaching ‘quality’. The standards collectively address the dimensions of teacher professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement. By so doing, they provide a framework which “presents a common understanding and language for discourse” (p. 2) around teaching quality amongst educational stakeholders, including teachers, students and parents. Several of the sub-elements of the seven standards draw explicit attention to teacher quality being demonstrated in working with Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, something unheralded internationally in national teacher professional standard statements (Santano, 2014). For example, APST 1.3 requires graduate teachers to “demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds” (AITSL, 2014, p.8). As well, APST 1.4 requires graduate teachers to “demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds” (AITSL, 2014, p.9). Further, APST 2.4 requires graduate teachers to demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages (AITSL, 2014, p.10).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Further elaboration around these standards is not provided by AITSL in its text-based documentation or web-based resource support for teachers leaving them, like many inclusive education policy imperatives, open to considerable interpretation (Snee, 2011). Despite the statement by AITSL (2014, p. 2) that the standards provide a “common understanding and language for discourse” (italics authors) for stakeholders they are somewhat enigmatic for teachers to explicitly address and enact (OECD, 2013). As Murray (1999) suggests, ‘demonstration-type’ teacher requirements are necessary to elucidate to teachers ‘low inference’ teaching characteristics and actions as opposed to those which are ‘high-inference’, which are open to personal interpretation (Murray, 1999). Murray calls for quality teaching guidelines to be underscored with language that minimizes inference and makes specific the tangible and observable teacher behaviours that indirectly or directly help learners to learn.

In all, APST 1 and 2, and these three sub-elements specifically, with their attention to knowing Indigenous students and how to teach these students, are underscored philosophically by a mandate for teachers in Australia to be responsive to the backgrounds of their students and thus inclusive in their practice for the betterment of students’ learning. They draw attention implicitly to the imperative for teachers to enact a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), which is defined as using students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for students (Gay, 2000) to ultimately respond to the varied needs of all learners (OECD, 2013). Correspondingly, a culturally responsive teacher (CRT) understands that students come to school with a whole set of practices, beliefs, skills, and understandings formed from their experience in their world. The responsive teacher’s role is not to ignore or replace these attributes, but to adjust their practice to work commensurately with students in the learning process (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan & Renaud; Lewthwaite et al, 2015; Moll, Amanti,

Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Culturally responsive teachers (CRT) are also critically aware of the operative conditions and practices of schools and classrooms, and, subsequently, can assist students by removing, or at least, navigating the barriers experienced by learners to support students' transition into the normative and typically unquestioned orthodoxies exercised in mainstream classrooms (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010). A CRT uses this knowledge as a foundation for taking constructive action (Giroux, 2010) to work *for* students in their schooling and learning process. Accordingly, a CRT will hold a critical awareness of the existence, and potential injustice of existing social conditions, including classroom practices. These practices have historically, and arguably, continue to disenfranchise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from learning experiences due to the practices of schools and classrooms that are symptomatically incongruent with their cultural norms (Nakata, 1999). A CRT re-examines and, ultimately, assists in the re-construction of classroom practices in order to work towards an adjusted social order in classrooms based upon a reconceptualization of what can and should be achieved for disenfranchised students.

Such teachers place emphasis on the 'consciousness' of one's condition amongst individuals, a 'conscientisation' as Freire (1970) asserts. Conscientisation is the first step in constructive action in an educational practice of consequence for students, especially through change in the social order and activity of classrooms. (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). Culturally located pedagogical processes move beyond the "*what* [we are learning] of classrooms to understanding the *how*, *why* and *possibilities* of classrooms that work *for* students of difference (Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan & Renaud, 2014). Although these assertions are not explicitly stated within these three APSTs, we do believe that they are implicitly asserted in the tenor of the standards.

The identified attention to CRP in the APSTs is a not a new phenomenon in Australia. In a recent review of the Australian literature, Lloyd, Lewthwaite, Osborne & Boon (2015) identified over 250 publications addressing this imperative for inclusive practice for Australia's Indigenous students. The assertions for CRP from Indigenous scholars such as Nakata (1999), Yungaporta (2010), and Sarra (2011) are well documented. Furthermore, non-Indigenous scholars such as Harrison (2011) and Perso (2012) have contributed significantly to this understanding. Despite these contributions, the literature review highlighted that the majority of the claims made in the Australian literature associated with teaching and teacher 'quality' refer to high-inference (as opposed to) low-inference teacher actions and are not substantiated through empirical research. Further, there was no evidence of studies that determined (1) what Indigenous students and parents claim to be the practices characteristic of quality teachers and their practices, (2) teachers' knowledge of these actions, and (3) the consequence of the enactment of such teacher actions on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' learning. In all, this suggests that AITSL's reference to high quality teaching for students of difference might be enigmatic for both the teachers that teach students of difference and teacher educators seeking to prepare graduate teachers to enact a pedagogy of difference (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). In response to this identified failure to identify such practices, we draw attention to Lingard's assertion that within Queensland schools, where this study is situated, there has been a legacy of a 'pedagogy of indifference' to difference that continue[s] to prevent marginalised students from accessing the cultural capital that is rewarded within mainstream education (2007, p. 262). This perpetuating situation is compounded by the assertion that despite the vast amount of research in this area, *there is a need to critically validate the generalisability of [commonly cited] 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 (Craven, Bodkin-Andrew, & Yeung, 2007, p. 4).

Notwithstanding the merit of the APSTs in assisting teachers in recognizing their current and developing capabilities, the APSTs and supporting materials specific to Indigenous students and their learning are conspicuously nebulous. Understanding perspectives of teacher quality and determining the influence of an enacted pedagogy of difference, from Aboriginal students and their parents, is the mandate of this three-phase research process.

The Research Focus

The research described here focuses on addressing the first part of this imperative by gaining insight into how Aboriginal students and their parents view teaching and teacher quality. In this paper, we present an extension of the outcomes of the first phase of a three phase research initiative which aimed to provide a better understanding of teaching quality from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait student and parent perspective; that is, to determine the teaching and teacher classroom practices that promote learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Although some of the research outcomes pertaining to this phase of the research have been published (Lewthwaite et al, 2015), this first phase also focused on understanding the degree of correspondence amongst Aboriginal parents', students' and teachers' views of responsive pedagogy. It sought to understand what each of these stakeholders identified as the practices that make learning more effective for Indigenous students. By examining the potential gap and mismatch in understanding of teaching 'quality' between teachers and their students and parents, we believe that teachers and teacher educators are in a better position to adjust their practices in order to ameliorate the transition Aboriginal students are likely expected to navigate in Australian classrooms. Further, it assists in providing example that finding a common understanding and language for discourse requires a broad participation of contribution before teachers are likely able to demonstrate the understanding and practice necessary for quality teaching to occur in their classrooms. The following question guided our research: What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, community members and parents identify as the teaching practices that promote Aboriginal students' learning?

Methodology

As previously described (Lewthwaite et al, 2015), the first phase of the study employed a variety of data sources to improve the confirmability and transferability in the findings. These sources consisted of student data from individual interviews with (a) 27 grade 9-12 students, all self-identifying as Aboriginal, in four schools, (b) group interviews with 16 Grade 9-12 students from four schools, (c) individual and group interviews with 27 parents and caregivers from all five schools, and (d) individual interviews with 26 teachers from the schools the students attended. It is important to note that the median age of teachers was 26, with a median of three years of teaching experience, most of which was confined to their current school or schools in urban centres where one might expect there would be a small proportion of Indigenous students. It is noteworthy that the schools' Indigenous student roll ranged from 14% to 100%. It is not the intent of the paper to draw interschool comparisons, primarily because the data gave little indication that this roll difference reflected in the commentary provided by any stakeholder group.

Interviews were conducted by the first author, often with the assistance of the fourth author. In all cases and in line with empirical existential phenomenology (Crotty, 1998), we asked open questions that provided opportunity for students, parents and caregivers to reflect on, without interruption or prompting, prior formal (school-based) and informal (family or community-based) learning experiences. In the semi-structured interviews, we asked students and parents questions about (a) what was happening when they (or their child) were learning best both in informal and informal settings, (b) what they would change about their teachers' teaching to assist them (or their child) in their learning, (c) teachers of good consequence and the characteristics of these teachers, both in informal and formal contexts and (d) if they (or their child) was to get a new teacher, what would they want the teacher to know about them (or their child) and their learning? Teachers were asked similar questions: (a) what informs their teaching of Aboriginal students; (b) what is happening when Aboriginal students are learning in informal and informal settings; (c) teachers of good consequence and the characteristics of these teachers, both in informal and formal contexts; and (d) what information would they provide to a new colleague about effectively teaching Aboriginal students. We left it open to the student, parent or teacher to decide to which of these statements to respond.

In all cases, the interviews were 'a chat' - non-jargoned and open, and delivered in a slow-paced and deliberate manner - based upon the need for collaboration between researchers and participants to construct the final story capturing the fundamental essence of participants' experiences (Bishop, 2003; Van Manen, 2007). The form of interviewing allowed the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial, open-ended questions were modified in the light of the participant's responses. An iterative rather than linear approach guided the process whereby prompts encouraged the participant to expand more thoroughly on their comments in order to explicate the thinking behind the response. For example, if a young person described learning in mathematics as 'difficult', attempt was made to seek what specifically was difficult, what caused this to be difficult, whether there were any other words that might describe more deeply or broadly the difficulty under consideration and the low-inference teacher actions that might mitigate this difficulty. This funneling approach (Smith & Osborn, 2007) was used sensitively as it served as a means to probe a deeper understanding of their response, often seeking clarification of terms used, sometimes terms that were emotive or high-inference by nature. To enhance research credibility, the interviewer, especially, at the end of the interview, reiterated what the respondent had said. On average, these initial conversations took 10-70 minutes for students, 45-90 minutes with teachers and 45 minutes to 3.5 hours with parents. There was no attempt to prolong or curtail conversations, ensuring instead that the conversation through questioning was facilitated and guided, rather than directed (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

All conversations were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The de-identified data, once analysed by the research team (that is, all authors), were shared with the Catholic Education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee and with the teaching and administration staff of the five Catholic Education schools in which the study was located. Thematic analysis was first conducted individually by the researchers and then collectively. The first step in the thematic analysis process involved open coding, which involved reading each of the transcripts to identify and code significant quotes. Coding allowed the researchers to individually and collectively review the whole of the data by identifying the breadth of comment from each stakeholder group and their most significant meaning as pertaining to their characterization of effective teaching. The preliminary analysis of the interview data from this stage, integrated with the literature (Lewthwaite et al, 2015), was used to inform the accounts to be presented in the first part of the Results section. Following this, we sought to investigate the correspondence amongst these three groups.

Results and Discussion

Because the purpose of this research was to identify (1) what the three groups of participants identified as characteristics of quality teaching and teachers for supporting learning and (2) the degree of similarity amongst these three groups, we organized the themes from our data around these two headings. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide detailed comments for each participant group that pertain to each theme. Because detailed accounts from students and parents are provided elsewhere (Lewthwaite et al, 2015) we present all abbreviated data in table form in Tables 1, 2 and 3. We use these tabulated data to elucidate the degree of correspondence among parents, students, and teachers which are elaborated on in the discussion that follows.

Participant Views of Quality Teachers and Teaching Practices: Parents' Comments

Five themes arose from the parental comments, and are presented in Table 1 below.

Theme	Description	Sample Comment
Understanding our history with education	Personal experiences that were negative and not forgotten that influenced their engagement with schools and teachers	<i>It is an important history because it helps to understand how many parents and their children approach education today</i>
Understanding the 'code-switching' required for our children	Parents understanding of the nuances of schools and what was privileged or a barrier for success in schools	<i>When you are at school you have to speak a certain way, even behave a certain way. It has to be different than at home</i>
Understanding our perceived inability to change schooling as it exists today	Conscious awareness of the invisible mechanism of control which by schools operate	<i>You really feel like you are at the mercy of the school and teacher</i>
Wanting schooling and teaching to affirm cultural identity and foster holistic development	Wanting schooling to be a vehicle for development of personal attributes deemed as important as culturally located individuals	<i>When I went to school, who I was [as an Aboriginal woman] was not important. That is not what I want today [for my children]</i>
Wanting teachers to hold an alternative view of Aboriginal students and their community	Parents' perceptions that they, their children or the community is viewed pathologically	<i>Just the way the teacher might think before they even have a chance. I want them to believe in my child.</i>

Table 1: Characteristics of Quality Teachers and Teaching Practices as Identified by Parents

The comments from parents and carers pertained to historical and perpetuating systemic issues in education commonly cited in the Australian literature (for example, Dunn, 2001; Frigo, Corrigan, Adams, Hughes, Stephens & Woods, 2014). Parents' comments were saturated with evidence of their inter-generational negative experience whereby they had experienced prejudice. There was little mention of actual low-inference teaching practices, albeit parental comments conveyed an understanding of the pivotal role of the teacher-student interface (Nakata, 2007) and its influence on their child's learning experience. Parents expressed hope for their child's education with anticipation of a different and better experience than their own in which they perceived they had experienced systemic neglect

through the processes and practices of schools and classrooms (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). In most conversations, participants expressed negative accounts of their own first-hand experiences and how they had been viewed with deficit by teachers, and subsequently pathologised (Shields et al., 2005) as ‘difficult to work with’, ‘a trouble maker’, ‘not interested’ or ‘likely to leave school’. Further, they extended their awareness of teacher deficit to whether teachers engaged with the community or not. Community engagement as demonstrated as the duration of time ‘in the [Aboriginal] community’ was seen as a visible evidence of a teacher’s view of community members and the community they represent.

Also, they identified that the operation of schools and the fluencies of behaviour and language necessary for successful ‘assimilation’ required a significant transition – what several parents referred to as ‘code switching’ for their children to be successful. As Nakata (2007, p.26) states, their narrative accounts were “‘tied up in the [inability to navigate] the practices ...of the Western order of things”. Student’s home culture was often seen by their parents to be incommensurable and discontinuous with school culture and academic success (Milgate and Giles-Brown, 2015). Parents’ comments indicated that they perceived they had little influence on the way schools operated, and were at the mercy of an unquestioned thinking and, subsequently, operation that catered to the aspirations and patterns of the dominant society only, and, as they perceived, made little allowance for cultural difference (Moll et al., 1992). Parents also typically commented on individuals within a school, typically, but not always, an Indigenous staff member, who they saw as critical points of contact in bridging the home and school divide.

As previously stated (Lewthwaite et al, 2015) parents’ claims gave unquestionable evidence of Freire’s notion of conscientisation (1970), drawing attention to parents’ awareness of the problematic nature of schools and schooling. Overall, parents believed that because the educational system paid limited attention to working on behalf of their students, it continued to sanction the perpetuation of long-standing inequality (Bourdieu, 1990).

Participant Views of Quality Teaching Practices and Teachers: Students Comments

In contrast to parents’ views, students’ commentaries pertained to specific teacher actions that they deemed to be supportive of their learning at the classroom level, either indirectly or directly. No mention was made of the systemic issues in education commonly identified by their parents. Seven themes emerging from the conversations are presented in Table 2 below.

Theme	Description	Sample Comment
Developing positive relationships as a foundation for learning	Students emphasizing the importance of relationship as the determinant precursor to constructive student-teacher relationships and learning	<i>Everyone [to her] is important. No matter who you are. Then, this all shows in how we behave to each other, not just her.</i>
Cultural bridges are used to promote learning	Physical and human resources are used to promote engagement with schooling and learning	<i>You want to be in a place where you feel welcome. The school encourages that [Aboriginal people] can contribute [to the learning process].</i>
Literacy demands are explicitly addressed	Identification of various ways teachers supported students with the literacy demands of curriculum areas	<i>It’s like she knows what words will give you trouble. That’s why what she does really helps.</i>

Learning intentions are made clear	Communication patterns that are dialogic, under-worded and specific to learning requirements	<i>Teachers talk in ways I am not used to and she keeps the most important information up front. There has to be that message that each students' learning is important. I just want that message there [for me].</i>
Teaching is differentiated to accommodate diversity	Effective teaching accommodates rather than assimilates difference especially in the learning process	She doesn't rush you through it and it's ok if I work at it until I get it.
Pedagogical expertise	Teachers able to employ a variety of practices to support learning, with attention to a gradual release of responsibility approach	<i>He makes things really clear and shows [things] really carefully. Lots of different ways.</i>
High expectations but with mechanisms to support and monitor student performance behaviour	Warm relationships within an environment of high expectations are the cornerstone for positive student-teacher relationships	<i>The rules are clear. She works hard to do her part and expects us to do our part. We know what she wants and she works with you</i>

Table 2: Characteristics of Quality Teachers and Teaching Practices as Identified by Students

In contrast to parents' conscious awareness of historical inequity was students' attention to their everyday school and classroom experiences. Students' commentaries largely reiterated a low-inference tangible outworking of parental comments, especially in reference to the importance of tangible relationship – as evidenced in verbal and non-verbal actions - as the determining precursor to constructive student-teacher relationships and learning (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). Students' comments, in contrast to parents, commonly focused on the specifics of pedagogy, which were then subdivided into several categories, most of which are repeatedly identified in the Australian literature (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). In all, over twenty tangible, low-inference representations of what they deemed as teaching 'quality' were commonly referenced (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). Evidence of the local community and the human and physical resources of the community used in teaching were identified as positive influences on their engagement with school and learning. Explicit teacher attention to the literacy demands of curricula was seen as a major characteristic of quality teachers. Clarity of speech and learning intent were seen as crucial for learning. The communication patterns encouraged by quality teachers were dialogical rather than univocal, voluntary rather than involuntary and under-spoken rather than over-spoken (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). Quality teachers used less abstract approaches such as visual images and modalities and oral narratives other than text (Yunkaporta, 2010). Their lessons were described as slow paced, attentive to repetition and mastery, in conjunction with verbal and non-verbal feedback (Sullivan & van Riel, 2013).

Students focused on how quality teachers accommodated rather than assimilated students in classrooms, especially in the teaching and learning process. In their comments was evidence of classrooms operating under guiding principles rather than imposed and restrictive rules. Students emphasised the importance of high expectations being vocally encouraged or visually represented for classroom behaviour and student performance, especially in operative terms that allowed everyone to engage in learning. Especially important was an organisational structure at the classroom level that provided time,

opportunity and support for students to learn and show learning (Nichol & Robinson, 2000). Also, classroom working allowed for assistance and feedback from peers; that is, a classroom grounded on learning reciprocally (Nichol & Robinson, 2000).

Finally, and likely most significantly, students most commonly mentioned the importance of verbally and non-verbally demonstrated warm relationships and high expectations being the cornerstones for positive student-teacher interactions and classroom environments (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). Students openly talked about their more common experience with ‘non-learning’ environments where ‘warm-demandingness’ was not manifest. Such environments were seen as reactive to student off task behaviour with little awareness of the importance of establishing positive relationships through verbal and non-verbal actions as a pro-active foundation for constructive learning (Noddings, 2002).

In all, students’ comments emphasised the employment of numerous tangible, observable practices in the classroom, rather than the more abstract, systemic concerns identified by parents. Students’ comments reiterated many findings asserted by Hattie (2009) and Archer and Hughes (2011), especially in regards to explicit attention to learning goals, provision of feedback and variety of practices to support learning. In addition, students also repeatedly endorsed teacher attributes that showed teacher sensitivity to students’ cultural backgrounds and, especially, language competencies. In all, students sought to be valued through the affordances of teaching practices they tangibly experienced.

Participant Views of Quality Teachers and Teaching Practices: Teachers’ Comments

The analysis of teachers’ commentaries provided evidence of nine themes representative of quality teaching practice. These are briefly presented in Table 3 below.

Theme	Description	Sample Comment
Teachers can demonstrate classroom skills and knowledge for enacting teaching expertise	Teachers awareness of their need for well-developed and a repertoire of classroom skills of practice	<i>My Indigenous students demand my best practice – capabilities and knowledge I know I don’t always have. You have to draw from so much knowledge – content, behaviour management</i>
Individual attention to diverse learning needs	Demand for differentiated instruction to address the variability in students’ capabilities, especially in responding to the areas of literacy and behavioural attributes of students.	<i>You want to do as well as you can for each child, but the demands are varied and sometimes quite complex</i>
Students’ holistic needs	A commitment to serving Indigenous students developmentally through attention to students broad learning needs, not just academically, but also socially, spiritually and, on occasion, culturally	<i>It has to be more than meeting achievement imperatives. I want my classroom to demonstrate attention to what the community also sees as important [which is broader] not just a focus on achievement</i>
Affective relationships	A commitment to developing positive relationships with Indigenous students	<i>It has to start with relationships. There has to be that sense that I am committed to each student</i>

Code switching	Awareness of adjustment Indigenous students had to make in negotiating the demands of schools, especially in reference to English language.	<i>You really need to assist students in adjusting to classroom rules and requirements. Language proficiency is a major stumbling block.</i>
Explicit teaching	The importance of explicit teaching, especially in drawing students' attention to learning goals	<i>Being really clear and making the reason why we are doing things clear. Then showing this clearly.</i>
Supportive environment	Creating a classroom environment that worked to support all students in their learning	<i>It has to be a safe and positive environment. Each student needs to know they are valuable and worthy of my time.</i>
Relevant learning	The importance of making learning relevant - "concrete" rather than "abstract" learning	<i>You must capture interest by being mindful of what is important to students.</i>
Cognitive learning processes	Description of practices that were perceived to promote learning for Indigenous students	<i>You draw from what you do know, mainly from your uni [veristy]experience. using multiple intelligences</i>

Table 3: Characteristics of Quality Teachers and Teaching Practices as Identified by Teachers

Although several of the comments made by teachers reflected students' requests, students' pedagogical comments were more varied and detailed tangible aspects and the importance of practice likely to be less obvious to teachers as instrumental for their learning. For example, teachers' comments consistently drew attention to the need for well-developed and diverse teaching skills to serve the diverse needs of Indigenous students, yet spoke about these practices from a high inference perspective with little attention to specific tangible practices that students might observe or experience in classrooms. Foremost in teachers' commentary was the requirement and capability to differentiate instruction to address the variability in students' capabilities, especially in the areas of literacy and behavioural support. Despite this attention to diversity, when prompted, teachers' knowledge of specific practices to attend to such diversity were not elaborated upon to the detail students communicated.

Teachers communicated a commitment to serving Indigenous students developmentally through attention to students' broad learning needs, not just academically, but also socially, spiritually and, on occasion, culturally. This is not surprising because, the ethos of Catholic Education explicitly attends to holistic learning for all students, and teachers' comments showed that this assertion was not mere rhetoric since they often mentioned the need to and means by which to attend to the multiple dimensions of students' development. Teachers commonly identified the role of Indigenous Education Workers within the school who assisted in helping teachers attend to these dimensions, primarily through their knowledge of the child and their home environment. Nonetheless, there was little evidence in teachers' commentaries that attention to students' cultural identities was necessary or the potential importance of using human or physical resources as previously identified in the Australian research as of value in supporting student engagement and learning (Christie, 1995).

Reference was commonly made to the importance of teachers developing positive relationships with Indigenous students, but with, again, little awareness, from a student or

parent perspective, of why this was an imperative. Teachers drew attention to how Indigenous students were “cautious learners” or “not confident learners”. Affirming students, especially in their learning, was an integral element of their teaching focus, despite explicitly commenting on why this ‘cautiousness’ existed. “Welcoming” students and “being there” were seen as critical components for building positive affective relationships with students that in turn promoted the conditions necessary for engagement and learning (Docket, Mason & Perry, 2006). Although students commonly commented on the importance of the duration of time spent with a teacher in contributing to their learning, this reference was not made by teachers.

Teachers repeatedly spoke of the adjustment Indigenous students had to make in negotiating the demands of schools, especially in reference to English language text. Reference to these norms was evident in terms such as being “familiar with English language”. Further, there was limited awareness of what students’ specific difficulties were with English language, especially in regards to students’ confidence in working with text. In contrast, students’ comments gave indication that deciphering and comprehending text was their frustration. As one student stated, “the words don’t tell you what to do”.

In response to the difficulty students often experienced in adjusting to the normative expectations of classrooms, teachers commonly made mention of the importance of explicit teaching, especially in drawing students’ attention to the learning goals of individual lessons but with less attention to providing, through demonstration, detailed focus to the learning process or the behaviours of classrooms that might be a part of the social norms and conventions of classrooms. Also, little attention was made to an awareness of a learning process corresponding to a gradual release of responsibility model (Archer & Hughes, 2011, Fisher & Frey, 2008), models that were commonly implicitly endorsed by students (Lewthwaite et al, 2015). Teachers drew attention to the importance of making learning relevant. Reference to “concrete” rather than “abstract” learning activities was common. “Concrete” activities usually were associated with “hands-on” activities. Teaching practices that drew attention to use of narrative, metaphor or visual reference were also absent from teachers’ comments (Yunkaporta, 2010). Awareness that these “concrete” experiences should be culturally located was not demonstrated by teachers but commonly mentioned by students. In all, teachers like students, referred to tangible, observable practices in the classroom, rather than the more abstract, systemic aspects identified by parents. In all, despite the apparent similarity between students’ and teachers’ comments, teachers did not show the same detailed and low-inference awareness and understanding of the source of students’ requested emphasis on diverse practices.

Degree of Similarity Amongst the Three Participant Groups

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

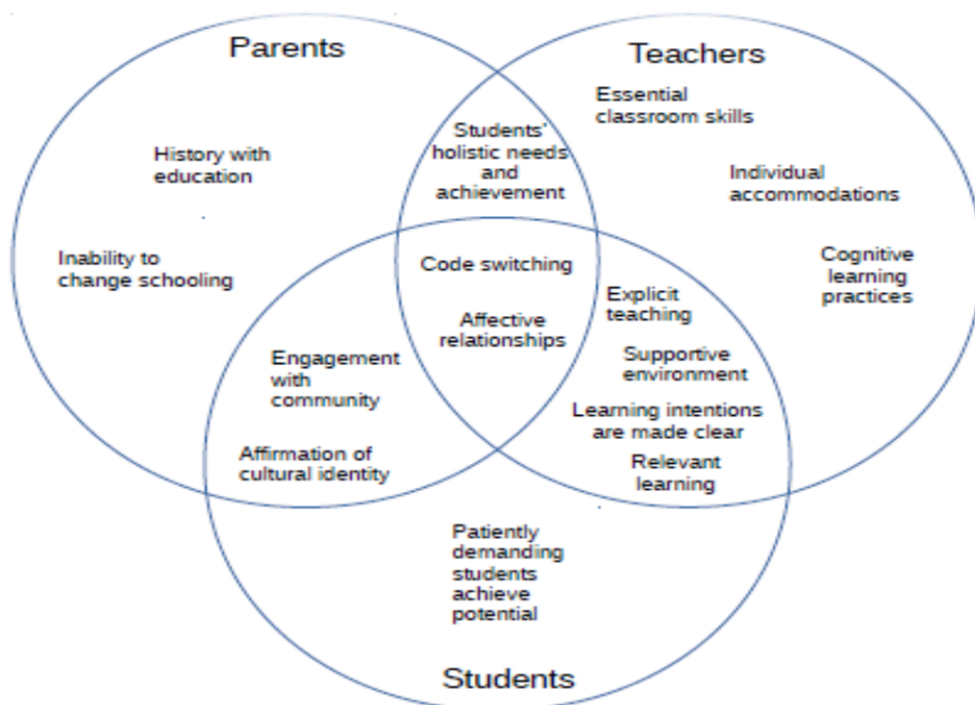


Figure 1: Quality Teaching Practices Reported by Aboriginal Parents, Students and Their Teachers: Comparisons and Contrasts

We draw attention to the few points of congruence as opposed to the many points of incongruence illustrated in Figure 1. First, we note the incongruence between teachers and parents in relation to knowledge of Indigenous peoples' histories. This incongruence is important because teachers' underdeveloped understanding (or potential under-appreciation) of this history significantly impacts on parents' and their child's engagement with schools, and helps to understand the tenuous nature of teacher-parent and teacher-student interactions. Parents' stories poignantly described their prior histories and its direct influence on educational engagement. At the forefront of parents' responses was their negative experience with mainstream education as a product of their colonised history. This experience was manifest in being de-valued and, subsequently, treated from a deficit perspective in regards to learning capacity and interest in educational engagement. Parents expressed a desire for a positive change for their children's education, but realized through their own histories that such hope was tenuous, and would only be realised through what were viewed as the actions of the 'exceptional' teacher. Parents perceived that such history continues to be unchallenged and typically unchanged, and perpetuates parents' conscious response to teachers and schools, usually negatively and prematurely, and ultimately negatively influences educational engagement (Kerwin, 2011; Lewthwaite et al, 2015). Quality teachers and teaching needed to acknowledge this history and realise that their steps in changing this pattern of indifference were a tangible representation of reconciliation. Such teachers were rarely mentioned and, if so, were identified as those who consciously and consistently put into action practices that removed obstacles for [Indigenous] students as fundamental to inclusive practice (Snee, 2011).

Second, we draw attention to students' lack of reference to this first aspect – individual and collective negative history in schooling. Despite this absence of explicit reference to history, students conveyed polarised experiences through their own personal educational history of being valued or devalued by teachers. Consequently, as a result of teacher actions, they implicitly communicated that they had evaluated and decided upon their

worthiness as learners and, consequently, whether they were experiencing inclusion in or exclusion from learning. Although students did not speak of the systemic neglect experienced by their parents, they often expressed a desire for manifestation of ‘care’ from teachers. When any reference to care was evidenced in narratives, the stories were emotive. Our analysis of text identified ‘I *just* want’ as the most common phrase expressed by students across the conversations implying students call for individual request for agentic care; that is, tangible expression from teachers that exhorted, admonished, challenged, and never failed to give up and compromise (Noddings, 2002). Unlike parents’ conscious awareness of being treated with deficit, students’ realisation of such was not evident, although their comments implied this was a phenomenon they had already had mixed and typically minimal enduring first-hand experience with in their years of schooling (Lewthwaite, Wilson, Wallace, McGinty & Swain (2017).

Third we draw attention to focus made by all participant groups on ‘code-switching’. Parents understood the orthodoxy of schools and what was privileged for success in schools (Perso, 2012; Rowe, 2006), both academically and socially. Lewthwaite et al, 2015 assert that the ‘matter of schools’ and means by which Indigenous students succeed in mainstream schooling is largely grounded in students’ proficiency in the social form of conduct and behaviours and the symbolic form of literacy and numeracy privileged by schools. Students were more implicit in their commentary about this phenomenon than parents and teachers. Students’ comments illustrated their desire for teachers to give attention in their teaching practice to explicit attention to assisting students in navigating this cultural interface (Nakata, 2007). Several parents and their children understood this and actively sought to inform and equip students in meeting this discrepancy. Teachers as well, but to a lesser extent, expressed an understanding of the need to consciously support students in this transition, but typically only referred to this in regards to linguistic attention. In all, students articulated multiple aspects of teaching practice – communication patterns, pace of instruction, deciphering text, use of analogies and narratives, modelling, local human and physical resources, reciprocal learning - that assisted students in their border crossing (Giroux, 2010).

Finally, we draw attention to the one element expressed by most participants as fundamental to quality teaching practice. All focused strongly on the need for the immediate establishment and maintenance of positive relationships in the classroom environment where *each* individual was respected and seen as important through validating actions, especially through time spent individually with students in supporting students in learning. It is likely that the most commonly mentioned words from all participants, overall, were the words “interested”, “welcome”, and “time with [me, her, him, them]”. Manifest in the description of the relationships was a priority on caring. Caring revealed itself in actions at the individual level— it noticed, acknowledged, listened, appreciated, supported, expected, challenged, affirmed and was responsive to each individual and their situation (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Pegg & Graham, 2013). It included, rather than excluded. Despite this attention to positive relationships, only parents voiced attention to the importance of relationships in establishing trust as a precursor to enabling student learning and parent engagement.

Summary

The recent release of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers draws attention in APST 1 and 2 to the imperative of teachers knowing their learners and how to teach their learners as indicators of teaching quality. Explicit within the APSTs is the attention to knowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and, in response, the practices that attend to students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference,

and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for students (Gay, 2000). The findings from this study suggest that although teachers show some consideration of practices responsive to their Indigenous students' requests, the knowledge and low-inference demonstration of practice that students and parents seek to see evidenced by teachers of this study is insufficient.

This finding is exacerbated by the fact that the teachers in this study were mainly early career teachers likely to have been exposed to issues embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and the tenor of the APSTs in their more recent pre-service teacher education. In all, teachers showed a limited awareness of the linguistic, social and behavioural capital that is necessary for success in mainstream classrooms; and the assistance most of our participating Aboriginal students identify as necessary for negotiating the demands of classrooms. Further, teachers showed a limited awareness of the importance students and, especially, parents place on cultural inclusion and affirmation, especially in regards to promoting an educational experience that validates cultural identity. Finally, in response to parents' views, teachers show a limited awareness of how historical and negative educational experiences continue to impinge on parent, and, subsequently, student engagement with schooling.

In all, the inclusion of APST 2.4 requiring graduate teachers to demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *histories*, cultures and languages (italics authors) is, based upon the findings of this study, problematic. It is the authors' impression, based upon ongoing national and international research, that teacher understanding of colonial histories and the impact this continues to have on parent-student-teacher interactions is imperative to substantive adjusted teaching practice (Lewthwaite, Owen & Doiron, 2014). As previously asserted (Lewthwaite et al, 2015) improvement in teaching practice requires a fundamental change in mindset at all levels of education from the macro-system government level to the belief system manifest at the classroom in the micro-system student-teacher interface. It is only with this multisystem change of mindset that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will, ultimately, experience a change in teacher practice and learning outcome.

Finally, Figure 1 with its three interconnected circles, visually demonstrates the collective lack of knowledge and understanding amongst the three participant groups in regards to a common language around 'quality' teaching. As mentioned, the APSTs are open to considerable interpretation, and, for teachers and teacher educators, somewhat enigmatic to explicitly address and enact (OECD, 2013). Currently, 'quality' teaching in Australia is not defined or decided by the very students who have much to say about quality teaching, drawing to question AITSL's claim that the APSTs "present a common understanding and language for discourse" (2014, p. 2). It is apparent from the small amount of correspondence amongst students, parents and teachers that dialogue amongst our participant groups around these quality practices is necessary. Ultimately, this action needs to be initiated by teachers in order to understand and enact the practices that will improve outcomes for all students in their classrooms. As our study progresses, we are finding for our participant teachers this is not a comfortable process – but they do understand, based upon students' and parents' comments, why seeking and enacting a pedagogy of difference starts with them. We are also hopeful that our ongoing research will contribute to a common understanding and language for discourse which will make the low-inference actions of quality teacher practice more tangible for our nations' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

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Acknowledgements:

This work was supported by the Australian Research Council under Grant 1301004201

Note

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