

Indigenous people
have rich and diverse
heritages education
essay



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Indigenous people have rich and diverse heritages, languages, cultures and knowledge built upon their relationships with each other, their ecologies and their links to time and space. These have resulted in diverse traditions, beliefs, customs and ceremonies. For hundreds of years, Indigenous people have incorporated into their languages and cultures their own ways of learning, including processes, protocols and practices for transmitting, sharing and assessing their heritage and knowledge (Buckskin, p. 38, 2002). Many different cultures exist within the Indigenous groups across Australia, each with their own styles and traditions of teaching and learning. The cultural differences can depend on residence; such as urban, rural and remotes areas, loyalty to traditions, spoken language and ability to interact using mainstream Western ways of learning (Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2006).

As there is a vast array of Indigenous cultural groups across Australia there will be a need for differential instruction when educating Indigenous children. As retaining culture is very important among Indigenous families and communities it is vital that future educators strive to meet the needs of Indigenous children and their families through planning and developing learning experiences that build Indigenous students' capacities to operate within the "two worlds". According to Hyde, Carpenter and Conway (2010) Indigenous parents have always valued education and want their children to succeed in mainstream education and have the same employment opportunities as other non-Indigenous children whilst retaining their cultural integrity. However, the majority of Indigenous people are afraid of losing their children to a bigger world, and their children losing their identity and

culture when being taught in a Western society (Creative Spirits, n. d.).

Therefore are faced with the difficulties of bridging two cultures together and having to maintain links of traditional ways of learning and adapting to Western ways of learning.

As mainstream education in schools across Australia do not naturally support traditional Indigenous approaches to learning it is important when educating Indigenous students that they are taught in ways that are most relevant to them and ways they can learn the best. This can be achieved through talking with parents or other family members. For example some Indigenous children may learn through observation, modelling and imitation, opposed to talking and listening; or learn through trial and error, rather than through words and instructions of the educator. However it is important to note that not all Indigenous people and communities learn in the same way (Hyde et al, 2010).

There are many approaches and strategies future educators can be put into place that can help bridge both cultures together. According to Harrison (2008) it has become a major struggle for Indigenous people to maintain their cultural identity while having their children taught under a different cultural system, especially for Indigenous children in an urban community. When schools work closely with Indigenous families and communities they can have a powerful influence in helping Indigenous children maintain their culture. Consequently, schools can also have a negative effect and potentially destructive force on Indigenous cultures and communities.

Understanding Indigenous perspectives in urban, rural and remote schools is a vital element of being a successful teacher of Indigenous students. There <https://assignbuster.com/indigenous-people-have-rich-and-diverse-heritages-education-essay/>

are many strategies that can be adapted to understand these perspectives and to incorporate them into teaching practices (Harrison, 2008). Such strategies include spending time with Indigenous children and their families at the school and in the community, collaborating with respected elders, and learning about the various aspects of Indigenous Australia. Only when educators can accommodate both Western and traditional Indigenous culture, students will be able to build socio-economic strengths, while maintaining and strengthening their cultural determination (Creative Spirits, n. d).

As Indigenous people are the owners and custodians of their knowledge and culture they have the right to be consulted when aspects of Indigenous history and culture are being incorporated into the school curriculum. Educators need to be aware of the practices of community consultation when establishing a relationship with Indigenous communities (NSW Board of Studies, 2008). Finding ways to consult and collaborate with Indigenous communities is imperative when developing appropriate learning experiences for Indigenous students. This may be as simple as speaking to parents or consulting respected elders within the community. When Indigenous families and communities are involved in the learning of their children meaning can take place. The NSW Board of Studies (2008) states that 'encouraging Aboriginal people to be involved in curriculum planning and delivery allows both teachers and students to explore Aboriginal history and culture through the life stories, practices and experiences of people from their local area. Such interaction allows Aboriginal students, non-Aboriginal students and teachers to develop mutual knowledge and understanding'

(NSW Board of Studies, pg. 5, 2008). The schools engagement with Indigenous parents is also a vital part of improving the effectiveness of Indigenous education. Indigenous parents are aware of the importance of education for their children and want them to succeed in life. However, when the values of parents clash with the values embodied in schooling, they are less inclined to encourage educational success (Hyde et al, 2010).

When planning and implementing learning experiences for Indigenous students' cultural awareness, cultural inclusivity and cultural competence need to be taken onboard. Cultural awareness recognises that we are all shaped by our cultural background, which influences how we interpret the world around us, perceive ourselves and relate to other people. Speaking to families and communities of Indigenous students is one way to gather information about the cultural background of Indigenous students in the classroom. Dr J Williams (2010) describes cultural awareness as a 'realisation of a deeper level of consciousness in knowing, perceiving, understanding and responding of individuals' culture. It also releases a new way of thinking, knowing and being, and learning to accept the legitimacy of this new way without precondition judgement which is important when teaching such a diverse group of students' (Williams, 2010). Knowing such information will better equip educators to develop learning experiences based on students' background, whilst being culturally inclusive.

Being culturally inclusive is more than valuing, engaging or embracing Indigenous cultures within the classroom, it also includes equal opportunity (William, 2010). The New South Wales Department of Education (NSW DET, p. 10, 2008) recognised the value of being culturally inclusive by defining it <https://assignbuster.com/indigenous-people-have-rich-and-diverse-heritages-education-essay/>

as 'engaging and embracing Aboriginal traditions, beliefs and values in addition to encouraging involvement and input' (NSW DET, p. 11, 2008). The NSW DET (2008) also states that concept of cultural competence aligns with a set of similar behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system or agency for professionals to work effectively in cross cultural situations. Cultural competence brings cultural awareness and cultural inclusivity together. As cultural competence is the logical outcome of awareness and inclusivity as agents of change it can be understood as a goal or destination that educators should attempt to reach as part of their professional development (Williams, 2010).

Many Indigenous children have been unsuccessful in schools as educators have not adequately understood their needs for different, informal learning styles. Therefore there is a need for 'two-way' education, by which Indigenous students acquire knowledge of their first culture and language as well as the culture and language of the dominate society. This approach involves two separate domains of education: one of Western tradition, and the other of Indigenous tradition (Buckskin, 2002). Tailoring the learning process for Indigenous students helps to engage their interest and allows them to succeed. In order to do this educators need to build relationships with individual children, gather information through conversations with students, parents and other educators, and through observing students in a variety of situations. It is important to note that Indigenous approaches to learning, simply knowing information is not enough. Students need to be supported, encouraged and challenged to own their learning, to bring it into

context, to make it part of their experience and to reflect on what they have learned (Alberta, 2005).

It also is vital that future educators understand Indigenous students' role within their community. Indigenous children may have a range of daily or weekly responsibilities that can affect their attendance at school, these responsibilities are also known as kinship. According to the NSW Department of Community Services (2009) ' kinship defines the roles and responsibilities for raising and educating children and structures systems of moral and financial support within the community' (NSW Department of Community Services, p. 13, 2009)'. At an early age, Indigenous children learn that kinship ties exist within their community and consequently their place in the community. It is important that educators are aware and respectful of kinship structures when working with Indigenous people as it may outweigh attending school or completing work in certain circumstances, for example a death in the family may result in non attendance as certain ceremonies need to be carried out (Harrison, 2008).

There is an enormous gap in the English literacy rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. The gap is even wider for Indigenous people living in remote and isolated communities. The development of English literacy skills is important for the life opportunities of Indigenous children (MCEETYA, 2001). Literacy ' provides them with the necessary skills to interact within mainstream society and avail themselves of the broadest range of civic, social, educational and employment possibilities' (Freeman & Bochner, p. 1, 2008). Literacy is perhaps the greatest single challenge for educators of Indigenous children. The literacy outcomes for Indigenous
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children are much lower than any other group in the community (Harrison, 2008). In many primary school classrooms the instructional strategies used to develop literacy skills are not consistent with the educational, social and cultural needs of Indigenous children and their families (Freeman & Bochner, 2008). There is a need for definite Differential Instruction, and this would involve adjusting teaching to suit children according to their differences (Hill, 2006).

According to Hill (2006) it's important to make quality connections between the home and school in order to explore the worlds of the children, their experiences, practices and their knowledge, and as a result we are bridging both worlds together. Linking children's literacy and learning experiences at home with the goals and objectives of curriculum can contribute to developing relationships between teachers and Indigenous families and communities. Indigenous children learn most effectively when there is a partnership between parents and teachers, when there is a sense of community between home and school environments, and where they feel safe and valued, their physical needs are met and they feel psychologically secure. As educators we can encourage the provision of positive, non-threatening, language rich environments in literacy classrooms, and support parents and communities in becoming or being further involved in their children's learning. According to Hill (2006) making connections between children and their families is a way to make the curriculum more meaningful. One of the most important areas of education in school is to enable children to express their thoughts clearly, coherently and fluently in an appropriate

manner for the occasion, and help them listen and respond with understanding (MCEETYA, 2001).

The importance of the recognition of Indigenous students' culture and identity cannot be overemphasised. Curriculums that are currently in place in schools across Australia tend to reflect and convey the values and learning styles of non-Indigenous students, with limited consideration to Indigenous culture and society. Many educators are now striving to incorporate an Indigenous perspective and ways of learning in their teaching plans to help close the gap (Hyde et al, 2010). The Indigenous struggle for education and cultural determination is a matter of accommodating both western and traditional indigenous cultures. Education has always been central to Indigenous economic, social and cultural development. Depending on the type of education an Indigenous child receives, it can determine their health, literacy, employment, social status and productivity (Creative Spirits, n. d).