

Indigenous education studies | analysis



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A good education determines a child's health, literacy, employment, social status and productivity. Mr. Noel Pearson an Indigenous leader, spokes person and advocate for Indigenous issues highlights the factors that have previously failed Indigenous children who have participated in Australia's Western education system, which in turn has resulted in the hesitation from Indigenous parents and people to embrace this style of education. He acknowledges the opportunities Western education provides for Indigenous children but at the same time underlines the cost to Indigenous beliefs and culture. As educators we must provide a balance between the two by building a classroom that is culturally competent so that Indigenous students can operate successful and respectfully in both worlds. The first step in achieving this goal is for educators to understand the importance of relationships and identity in relation to Indigenous cultural beliefs. Educators must recognise how hard Indigenous people have had to fight and the obstacles they have had to overcome for the basic rights of education and cultural determination, and how policy has dictated for the majority of the last century and a half how they live their lives and how they are educated. In order for educators to develop and implement a culturally competent classroom, they need to develop a programs that demonstrates and foster cultural awareness and cultural inclusivity, only when these two things are reached can a classroom successfully become culturally competent. The second step is when educators are considering the curriculum and their own pedagogy they must be aware of the curriculums and their own sociological dispositions in relation to the affect of the teaching and learning process. The third step describes how educators can achieve cultural competency in their

classroom through the programs that harbour Indigenous students' capacities to operate within the "two worlds".

Indigenous communities have particularly strong family values and raising a child is everybody's responsibility including their care, discipline and education (Korff, n. d.). Indigenous people often relate to each other through their families connections and relationships hence, why they rely on and nurture strong family ties as a means of passing on their cultural beliefs from one generation to the next. Indigenous people believe that without these relationships children will lose their cultural beliefs and identity. 'The power of Indigenous people to give voice to who they are, defining their identity and relating their history is fundamental to their existence' (Korff, n. d. & Hanlen, 2010). Having your own identity is powerful. Losing that identity through Westernised education is a threat that some in the Indigenous community may envisage for their children. Dr Shayne Williams agrees, stating 'we were caught between wanting access to education, as a matter of equality, and the overwhelming reality that the education system demanded that we abandon our cultural identity' (William, 2011, module 1). It should not come as a revelation then to discover that this scheme of cultural separation continues to inform Indigenous peoples' cultural resistance of Western education. 'This resistance has led to the assertion of very specific cultural demands for education' (William, 2011, module 1).

These cultural specific demands for education developed as a result of government policy that dates back to the 1800s. The government formed boards that carried out these policies; the first board was called the Aborigines Protection Board (APB), a board that the New South Wales (NSW)

government set up in 1883, which later changed to Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB) in 1940. There were boards like this in every state and territory in Australia; these boards were finally dismantled in 1969 (Heiss, 2002, as cited in Williams, 2011, module 1). In the time they were created they established many policies regarding the treatment and education of Indigenous people. From 1850s mission education- where missionaries believed it was their core duty to educate Indigenous people in Christian life, to the governments segregation policies which segregated Indigenous people from main society and placed them in missions, reserves and stations, to the assimilation policies which were a 'concept of education for domestication'. When these policies failed to work in colonising Indigenous people into 'civilised Europeans', it was thought that they had low intelligence, which resulted in their inability to embrace Christian life. Much of Indigenous culture was lost during this period of time, especially in terms of language; however, after all the adversity they still continued to have their profound sense of identity (William, 2011, module 1). It should be noted that these previous mentioned policies are only a few introduced by the government, there were many more. Finally in 1982 the NSW Department of Education introduced the first 'Aboriginal Education Policy'. 'In 1989 the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) was formally introduced'. The 1982 policy was the first time Indigenous people were openly accepted into the educational system for their given right to an education, something non-Indigenous people have always had access to (William, 2011, module 1). This was the first of many Indigenous education policies to come. The 2008 NSW Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Education and Training (DET AETP) Policy is the current policy used by all government schools; it is <https://assignbuster.com/indigenous-education-studies-analysis/>

the first policy to recognise cultural inclusivity (Williams, 2011 & NSW DET, 2008).

Even though the NSW DET 2008 education policy was introduced, educators still have to recognise the long term effects that previous policies had on Indigenous people, especially regarding sending their children into Western education. Majority of Indigenous people still feel the impact from decades ago which in turn filtrates down through the generations, especially as Indigenous people relate and learn through each other's experiences and relationships. The parents of most Indigenous students would have felt the negative effects of a system that did not provide a culturally meaningful education. It is important for educators' to keep this in mind. Williams believes 'the changes that are taking place now are just recent and it will take several generations of Indigenous cultural contact with mainstream education to fully redress the legacy of racial marginalism' (2011, module 1).

Three important things for all Australians to remember when considering Australia's collective history are cultural awareness, cultural inclusivity and a cultural competence. Educators need have a good knowledge of these notions in order to achieve them successfully in their classrooms. Williams describes cultural awareness as the '... realisation of a deeper level of consciousness in knowing, perceiving, understanding and responding... It envelops the process of being awoken to a new way of thinking, knowing and being, and learning to accept the legitimacy of this new way without preconditioned judgement' (Williams, 2010, p. 25 as cited in Williams 2011, module 1). Often people's attitudes towards Indigenous people are based on over-generalisations based on little knowledge. Indigenous people believe

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one learns through the experiences they share with family, friends, mentors and elders. Non-Indigenous people undervalue skills such experiences teach, including storytelling and listening because they think it is something Indigenous people are born with rather than it is a learned skill. Hence they fail to respect skills of oral culture and understand the importance of giving all your attention to the person who is talking (Korff, n. d.). In terms of cultural inclusivity the NSW DET defines it as 'engaging and embracing Aboriginal traditions, beliefs and values in addition to encouraging involvement and input' (NSW DET, 2008, p. 11 as cited in Williams, 2011, module 1). In order for this to be successfully in developing non-Indigenous perspectives the government must take a holistic approach by ensuring the inclusivity is present at both; the macro level (education system) and the micro level (classrooms). 'Culture inclusivity builds on the notion of cultural awareness because it centres on the process of actioning consciousness in order to evolve praxis to reflect cultural equal opportunity; that is tangible cultural presence within curriculum and pedagogy' (Williams, 2011, module 1). Culture competence is observed as the result of cultural awareness and cultural inclusivity. Educators can endeavour to achieve cultural competence as part of their professional development by creating 'educative platform where knowledge and skills are brought together for the generation of new innovative, culturally responsive modes of teaching and learning' (Williams, 2010, p. 26 as cited in Williams, 2011, module 1).

'It is common to assume that education is essentially neutral, that is that education is objective and not influenced by social, cultural or even political interests. Assumptions of this kind, however, are fundamentally unsound

because education is an essential element in the maintenance and continuance of society. Education is a fundamental process in society for reproducing attitudes, values and, in fact, culture' (Williams, 2011, module 2). The following issues are some reasons why Indigenous people have hesitation with Western education.

Curriculum:

When considering curriculum it is important for educators to take into 'account their own social, cultural and political activity so they can develop a critical view of curriculum' (Williams, 2011, module 2) as the people who sit on curriculum committees are often representatives of the same dominate 'cultural arbitrary', which therefore produces a curriculum that is going to be of a similar product. Most Indigenous people in Australia want self-determination within the existing nation. This would give Indigenous communities the power to make decisions that affect them and therefore would allow them more input in the curriculum and in turn their education.

Pedagogy:

Just as the curriculum has its own sociological prejudices, teachers' pedagogies often have their own sociological influences too. Williams states that 'when a teaching transaction takes place, be it formal or informal, the sociological disposition of the person teaching always attaches to the teaching process' (2011, module 2). As a majority of Australia's educators reflect the dominant group in society implications can arise when achieving cultural competence. When there is a " systematic lack of optimism and belief in educational success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

students" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000b, p. 10 as cited in Parrington, n. d.) by the educators, problems will arise in creating a teaching platform that is of a cultural competency.

'Unfortunately, many of the problems-and possibly the more significant ones-experienced by Indigenous students at school arise from the beliefs and practices of teachers rather than the attributes and behaviours of the students' (Partington, 1997 as cited in Partington, n. d.). A way to address this issue would be to ask for Indigenous input in one's pedagogy and classroom. When educators fail to take in Indigenous styles of learning they can limit the number of positive experience these students have at school. For example; Western culture actively values individualism, competitiveness and ownership. Indigenous culture disapproves of such behaviours because they are of a conflicting nature. They teach their children to share and support each other and work about achieving a community approach to learning, no one owns a particular piece of information/object it is open for all to learn or have.

When educators are not aware of their sociological influences and have limited knowledge of Indigenous culture then implications can and most likely will arise. The result being Indigenous misconceptions and stereotyping that can lead to negative perceptions of Indigenous culture which in consequence makes Indigenous students feel isolated, misinterpreted and undervalued. Partington agrees stating 'this lack of recognition of the validity...'results in hesitation by Indigenous people to send their children to Westernised schools (n. d., p. 3.).

An awareness of Indigenous health issues is also necessary for educators as half of Indigenous students in any class suffer from conductive hearing loss at the one time. 'These consequences, which are most severe in the early years of schooling, include inattention, behaviour difficulties, poor attendance, low achievement and, in particular, problems in learning to read and write' (Partington, n. d., p. 3.). For Indigenous students who do not speak English as their first language, communication difficulties are worsened.

The Government policies can advise and direct educators to a certain point, however it is up to the educator to implement these policies in cultural appropriate ways and use strategies that will assist Indigenous students to overcome any learning difficulties that may arise (Partington, n. d.). To be effective in this regard an educator must recognise how Indigenous people see education benefiting them, because even though there is a policy it does not assure Indigenous success or participation in education (Williams, 2011 & Frigo & Simpson, n. d.).

According to Williams (2011) Indigenous people see that 'education must as a matter of cultural relevancy:

support Indigenous cultural survival and revival through the proactive advancement of Indigenous identity and worldview

support Indigenous cultural survival and revival through the proactive promotion of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being

enable Indigenous children to maintain their pride in their cultural identity, without the fear of ridicule, as the direct descendants of Australia's first peoples

provide Indigenous children with access to Western modes of literacy, numeracy and other Western disciplines of knowledge without compromising, or otherwise diminishing, Indigenous ways of knowing actively progress Indigenous reconciliation with the wider Australian community through the teaching of Indigenous history and Indigenous experience from an Indigenous standpoint as a primary reality of the Australian nations past

support and actively promote Indigenous community development through education processes that work towards the achievement of Indigenous economic and social parity' (module 1).

Educators can use the Two Way Approach (TWA) to meet the above points cited by Williams. This approach assists educators in achieving a culturally competent classroom while at the same time supporting and equipping English as a Second Language/English as a Second Dialect (ESL/ESD) Indigenous students with the necessary skills required to operate within the "two worlds" (Western and Indigenous). In order for ESL/ESD learners to succeed in accomplishing this, 'they must be able to move from the known to the unknown. This includes fitting new understandings with existing ones, resolving inconsistencies and discrepancies between what is known and what is new knowledge, relating new knowledge to personal experience and ideas, and integrating such new knowledge' (WADE, 2011, p. 8).

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The TWA allows a two way exchange of knowledge between educators and Indigenous students- Indigenous students learn about Western knowledge and practices while educators appropriately recognise Indigenous knowledge and skills. This process is facilitated by an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) who work in partnership with a non-Indigenous educator to 'ensure Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning are explored and vice versa' (WADE, 2011, p. 8.). The facilitating process also helps link schools and the wider community to 'ensure the development of common goals and understandings' (WADE, 2011, p. 8.). Appendix (A) describes how educators and AIEOs can implement the TWA in culturally appropriate to their programs.

Other essential things for educators to remember when planning their programs to 'successfully embed Indigenous identity and perspective into curriculum in a culturally respectful and culturally responsible way' (Williams, 2011, module 3) are: do not shy away from Australia's historical reality- approach it with balance, be thoughtful and considerate - 'never make a division between Indigenous pre-invasion society and contemporary Indigenous society'(Williams, 2011, module 3), forge links with local Indigenous parents and communities, 'ensure that whenever you present Indigenous perspective within your curriculum that you do so on the basis that this perspective is as much a part of the sociological framework of Australian society as a whole as it is Indigenous, do not project conclusions over who is right and who is wrong. When Indigenous worldview is put forward with equality within teaching content Indigenous perspective is more properly projected' (Williams, 2011, module 3), and finally the power of

language- how you express yourself is very important in how your knowledge is interpreted.

Although Indigenous people have made inward roads into achieving cultural and educational determination, there is still a long road ahead in order to accomplish cultural competency on a national scale. However, starting in the education system will eventually see this reached as 'education is the fundamental process in society for reproducing attitudes, values and, in fact, culture' (Williams, 2011, module 1). The more effective education of teachers on Indigenous culture and ways of life will result in this change happening more rapidly, but for now educators must remember to provide a balance between the two worlds by building a classroom that is culturally competent so that Indigenous students can operate successful and respectfully in both worlds.