



Provide high intellectual challenge

Across the Pan-Pacific Rim, Indigenous communities have been demanding their children get access to rigorous learning, or borrowing from Delpit¹:

I suggest that students must be *taught* the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of ... life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge, while being helped too acknowledge their own "expertness" as well ...

This demand resonates with decades of critique of deficit discourses in schools (Hattam & Prosser, 2008). In mean-time, policy makers assert a need to focus on a back-to-basics approach for 'disadvantaged' students [including especially Indigenous students]. As well, high stakes testing pushes teachers towards narrow technicist versions of literacy and numeracy, or *fickle literacies*² that treat language itself as the end point of learning, rather than language for meaning making or for changing the world. Put simply, the policy regime now pushes teachers towards highly scripted pedagogies or *pedagogies of indifference*.³ From a culturally responsive pedagogies perspective, its urgent that our schooling systems improve the achievement of Indigenous students in our schools, and that cannot happen without providing intellectually challenging learning tasks. But then more rigor, in the traditional sense is not enough!

Rather than focus on remedial or a basic skills curriculum, all students should be challenged with intellectually demanding learning that should be scaffolded carefully to enable all students to be successful in this learning. What this means exactly takes many variations and depends upon year level and the specifics of each curriculum area. Existentially, ensuring that all students are successful in learning the powerful codes, comes down to whether or not teachers can sustain meaningful engagement with their students or whether they can sustain positive educative relationships whilst asking their students to complete difficult learning tasks.⁴ What counts as rigor for a decolonizing culturally responsive approach requires redesigning curriculum and pedagogy that takes up the challenge of (dis)engagement,⁵ and needs to be informed by the following four provocations.

Some examples include the following:

- Working with curriculum frameworks that encourage the designing of rigorous learning tasks [such as Luke and Freebody's [4 resources model](#) for literacy]
- Designing learning tasks that can be performed for an audience

- Designing learning tasks that demand students research their own communities and hence contribute to an archive of knowledge produced about their own community
- Enacting pedagogies that develop capacities for discussion and disagreement

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- ¹ [Delpit, L.](#) (1988) The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3): 280-298. The quote from p. 296.
- ² [Comber, B., & Woods, A.](#) (2016). Literacy teacher research in high poverty schools: why it matters. In J. Lampert & B. Burnett (Eds.), *Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools*. New York: Springer.
- ³ [Lingard, B.](#) (2007) Pedagogies of indifference. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 11(3): 245-266.
- ⁴ Hattam, R. Zipin, L., Brennan, M. & Comber, B. (2009) Researching redesigning pedagogy in the middle years, *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*. 30(3): 297-301.
- ⁵ Munns, G., Sawyer, W. & Cole, B. (eds) (2013) *Exemplary Teachers of Students in Poverty*. London: Routledge.