



## Reading summary

**Diplock, A. (2023). A case study on connecting to student lifeworlds and why teacher subjectivities matter: New perspectives. In L.-I. Rigney (Ed.), *Global perspectives and new challenges in culturally responsive pedagogies: Super-diversity and teaching practice* (pp. 109–118). Routledge.**

Australian teachers need pedagogical techniques to help them to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, and to redress the disparities in education outcome, especially for Aboriginal students. One key idea that is promoted in work on culturally responsive pedagogy is connecting to students' life worlds. This idea leads to both possibilities and risks in practice, and this chapter is a case study of a teacher's dilemmas and strategies when a student brought traumatic lifeworld knowledge to class. The chapter draws on portraiture to allow the case study teacher to co-construct the text.

The teacher took part in an action research project on culturally responsive pedagogy. She was determined to value difference, to confront deficit constructions of some students, to break down power inequities and to create productive relationship with her students. One of her students, who had a refugee background, brought to class his own story of 'difficult knowledge', prompting his teachers to discuss whether there are student knowledges that should not be shared in the classroom, or whether there are risks to the student of not engaging with their story. Teachers need to ensure they include refugee students, including their experiences, and that they do not reproduce knowledge hierarchies that marginalise these students' experiences. Teachers need to make a decision about how to respond each time difficult knowledge is shared based on their relationship with their students and their assessment of students' emotional responses.

In this case study, the teacher worked with the student, using his story of trauma as a resource to develop his literacy skills. She granted him power over how he told his story and

positioned herself as a learner, while still using her power as a teacher to scaffold his skill development and to set boundaries on the behaviour of other students. The teacher therefore positioned herself as a learner and a researcher, and also as the curator of power relations in the classroom, setting constraints that enabled the students and herself to co-construct learning.

## Take-home messages

**Students bringing 'difficult knowledge':** When teachers work with students' lifeworld knowledge, they risk encountering complex, difficult knowledge. It may be possible to use this knowledge as a resource for learning if teachers respond with sensitivity and with an understanding of their students' responses.

**Teachers' subjectivities:** Redesigning pedagogy to respond to students' life worlds requires teachers to re-examine not just their actions, but their subjectivities.