



Reading summary

Hattam, R. (2023). Towards a decolonising Australian culturally responsive pedagogy? In L.-I. Rigney (Ed.), *Global perspectives and new challenges in culturally responsive pedagogies: Super-diversity and teaching practice* (pp. 75–87). Routledge.

The research project 'Towards an Australian Culturally Responsive Pedagogy' was originally proposed with the rationale that Indigenous students in Australia often have very poor outcomes from schooling and that culturally responsive pedagogy would improve these outcomes. International studies on culturally responsive pedagogy have shown that it has fostered academic success for First Nations students, although such studies are scarce in Australia.

When the project began, it became clear that urban schools with a significant number of Indigenous students were highly culturally and linguistically diverse. A second rationale for the project, then, became the need to develop pedagogies that do not just work for Indigenous students but also cater for the super-diversity in Australian public school classrooms.

A third rationale for the project soon developed: to deliberately confront the role of schooling in the production of a postcolonial nation. Part of the project became ensuring that educators not only reflect on the historical legacy of education as integral to the colonial project, but also redesign pedagogies that challenge the old and new forms of colonisation that distort our nation and schooling systems. This included a commitment to redesigning curriculum and pedagogy to reject the monologue of the colonial nation and instead enact dialogic pedagogies that connect with Indigenous languages, worldviews, cosmologies and institutions.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is characterised by five themes:

1. Provide high intellectual challenge. Instead of deficit discourses, 'fickle pedagogies' or 'pedagogies of indifference', all students should be challenged with intellectually demanding learning that should be scaffolded carefully to enable all students to be successful.
2. Connect strongly to students' life worlds. We should strive to integrate life-world and subject discipline knowledges in ways that do not trivialise either. Teachers should see themselves as ethnographers and their students as researchers.
3. Ensure that all students feel positive about their own cultural identity in classrooms.
4. Empower students to perform their learning for an audience and to use multimodal literacies to demonstrate their learning. These practices increase students' motivation and engagement.
5. Take up an activist orientation. Students can educate the wider community about the issues they are studying and can connect their learning to struggles around social problems that matter to them.

All of this work must transform what it means to be a student and what it means to be a good teacher in Australian public schools.

Take-home messages

Pedagogy to challenge colonialism: A redesigned pedagogy should not just improve academic outcomes for culturally diverse students, but also challenge persisting colonial discourses.

Both students' knowledges and discipline knowledges: We should strive to integrate life-world and subject discipline knowledges in ways that do not trivialise either.

Students as activists: Students can be activists in the struggles that are relevant to their lives, including using their learning to educate their community.