



## Reading summary

**Hattam, R. (forthcoming 2024). Toward the knowledge-producing school. In R. Hattam, R. Garrett, & Wrench (Eds.), *Re-imagining just pedagogies*. DIO Press.**

This chapter is a provocation to school leaders and teachers to reimagine their curriculum and pedagogical work so that they connect with the communities they serve. It is also a call to teachers to reclaim their right to make significant decisions about what goes on in their classrooms, despite policy pressures that undermine their professional autonomy.

Current Australian education policies strengthen schools' function of reproducing social stratification, in a backlash against the social justice gains of the twentieth century. Backlash pedagogy that is being pushed onto teachers reasserts forms of didactic teaching, such as explicit instruction and 'back to basics'.

As Delpit explains, many students experience a cultural dissonance in their classrooms because their vernacular knowledges and everyday experiences are absent, misrepresented or muted in the curriculum. To push back against backlash pedagogies, teachers must be committed to dialogic approaches that treat student life-world knowledges seriously in a curricular and pedagogical sense.

An important pedagogical approach sees students as researchers, where students produce knowledge by researching their own life worlds and the concerns of their communities. Rather than being consigned to an undemanding repetitive curriculum, students-as-researchers are positioned both as knowledgeable people, and as knowledge producers. This only succeeds if teachers are seriously inquisitive about the life worlds of their students and the concerns of their communities.

Several approaches have been proposed that can inform such a pedagogy. The best known is funds of knowledge, which sees the knowledge of historically marginalised communities as a resource for classroom learning. Another is place-based education, which encourages

students to investigate the features and issues of their own region or community. A local literacies approach holds that the traditional school curriculum often ignores the rich literacy practices of non-elite communities, and that students may be more engaged in studies of popular culture or youth subcultures.

This challenge to reform pedagogy will be even more productive if the knowledge-producing classroom is scaled up to the knowledge-producing school. Schools are already sites of policy enactment, so they can be sites of policy interpretation and resistance. Further, reforms initiated by teachers are rarely sustained in the long term in the absence of enabling conditions at the school level. Schools should become sites for the production, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge about their local communities. Schools could become local research centres with capacity-building resources for doing research of many kinds.

## Take-home messages

**Students as researchers:** Instead of moulding young people for future learning and work, schools should be places where they learn how to learn and conduct their own research that contributes to making their communities better places to live.

**Teachers as learners of students' life worlds:** The students-as-researchers approach requires teachers to be open to learn and to be seriously inquisitive about the life worlds of their students and the concerns of their communities.

**Knowledge-producing schools:** Knowledge-producing classrooms are only sustainable in knowledge-producing schools. These schools could be sites for the production, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge about their local communities.