



Reading summary

Rigney, L.-I. (2020). Aboriginal child as knowledge producer: Bringing into dialogue Indigenist epistemologies and culturally responsive pedagogies for schooling. In B. Hokowhitu, A. Moreton-Robinson, L. Tuhiwai-Smith, C. Andersen, & S. Larkin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of critical Indigenous studies* (pp. 578–590). Routledge.

Embracing Indigenous epistemologies encompasses privileging Indigenous voices, upholding the integrity of cultural knowledges to resist hegemony, and promoting Indigenous self-determination. Previous international work has recognised the importance of valuing the knowledge of Indigenous individuals and communities, but the importance of seeing the Australian Aboriginal child as an intelligent, competent knowledge producer of their own life-worlds has been under-theorised. This chapter brings together principles from Indigenous epistemologies with the transnational work on culturally responsive pedagogies.

Outside Australia there have been many conceptualisations of the competent child with citizenship rights, from Dewey to Vygotsky to Reggio Emilia and Freire. Other approaches, such as funds of knowledge and multi-literacies draw on students' prior knowledge. Culturally responsive pedagogies promote teaching that uses students' personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments. Indigenous epistemologies likewise see Aboriginal children as co-constructors of knowledge with their communities. Yet the current Australian neoliberal culture in education, with an audit culture focusing on standardised testing perpetuates a deficit view of Aboriginal students.

A rights-based approach to schooling could also increase Aboriginal students' engagement and inclusion. This would include recognising the right to one's own subjectivity and language, the right to produce knowledge that privileges Indigenous epistemologies and voices, and the right to freedom from racism and colonialism.

There is an increasing gap between the school achievement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. To narrow this gap, we need teachers to value diversity, student voice and agency, and to construct knowledge-producing schools. Teachers should respond to their school context and place, and should see students as a community of inquirers. Classroom practices need to shift from didactic to dialogic relationship-based teaching.

The chapter includes a case study of teachers at one Australian secondary school who sought to reorient their teaching using a framework of Indigenist epistemologies and culturally responsive pedagogies. They implemented dialogic approaches such as Yarning circles, and co-developed inquiry learning processes where students researched issues of concern to their communities.

This case study and the earlier literature suggest that a culturally responsive approach to enacting the Aboriginal child as a knowledge producer should include: providing high intellectual challenge; connecting strongly with students' life worlds; recognising culture as an asset for learning; reflecting critically and taking an activist orientation; building respectful relationships; and promoting student voice, participation and leadership.

Take-home messages

Connecting prior knowledge to global knowledge: Teachers should enable production of knowledge in the classroom that connects prior local knowledge to global knowledge.

Aboriginal children as co-constructors of knowledge: Aboriginal children are more likely to succeed at school if they are seen as co-constructors of knowledge for their own interests, for their community, and for outsiders.

Building relationships for inclusion and knowledge co-construction: Teachers can foster inclusion by building relationships with students and among students, and with the local community. This will be a basis for co-constructing knowledge.