Chapter 9

Teaching and learning

There is no one right way, but there are right things to do

Lillian Miller and Carly Steele

Who we are

Lillian Miller
Lillian Miller is a proud Dyribal, Mbarbarram, and Yidinji woman from the Atherton Tablelands area. Lillian has taught for 25 years within State and Independent schools in Queensland and New South Wales. Since 2007, Lillian has worked for Catholic Education Services, Cairns as an Education Officer for Indigenous Education. Her skills and expertise in curriculum development, particularly in Mathematics education, ensure that she is held in high regard locally and nationally. Part of this recognition includes her work on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Project called 'Mandalany' and 'Yumplatok'. During 2014–2017, she sat on the ACARA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group. Lillian has recently completed her Masters in Indigenous Languages Education at the University of Sydney in 2018.

Carly Steele
Carly Steele is non-Indigenous and has taught for 12 years. During this time she shifted her teaching focus to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and has never looked back. She has since spent seven rewarding years working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in northern Western Australia, Far North Queensland and the Northern Territory. She has recently completed her PhD at the University of Melbourne researching aspects of second dialect acquisition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners. Carly is currently a Lecturer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education at James Cook University.

Introduction

This chapter is about effective ways for teaching and supporting the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These ways can be broadly categorised as 1) building relationships through valuing home language and culture, and connecting with students' families and home life; 2) practising culturally responsive teaching through adapting the curriculum and implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies; and 3) empowering learners by holding high expectations and through developing Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs). Research presented throughout this chapter shows that these approaches have a

positive impact on learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, how these approaches are implemented can vary greatly according to the environmental context, school, teachers, and students. Real-life examples are used to explore how these approaches can be implemented in different classrooms in effective ways.

Building relationships

Building relationships with your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families is imperative for successful teaching and learning in the classroom (Byrne & Munns, 2012; Harslett, Godfrey, Harrison, Partington & Richer, 1999; Hudsmith, 1992) and this should not be understated. We suggest that while building relationships is important for all students, it is crucial for the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. As indicated in Chapter 7, how teachers build relationships with each student will differ depending on a number of factors, including the personality of the students and their teacher. One key to building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is the valuing of students' home language and culture. This also involves making a strong connection with students' family and home life.

Valuing home language and culture

For teachers to value their student's home language and culture, they must first learn about their language and culture.

As described in Chapter 8 and the Our Land Our Languages Report (Australian Parliament, House of Representatives, 2012), language is important to every aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives. Including Aboriginal language and cultural programs into our teaching has significant benefits both for individuals and their education: "early childhood Aboriginal language and cultural programs lead to increased self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved school attendance, reduced drop-out rates and better proficiency in reading skills in both the Indigenous language and English" (p. 99). (See also Gower & Byrne, 2012; Harrison, 2011; Sarra, 2011.) Furthermore, learning about languages is beneficial for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because it leads to better understanding between different people, their cultures and identities. It can also work to support and promote reconciliation. Finally, for us as teachers, an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, language, and history is a vital component of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Teaching Standards 1.4 and 2.4:

- **1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:** Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- **2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians:** Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages.

The role of languages other than Standard Australian English (SAE) in the classroom can be contentious. However, it is important to recognise students' language and culture in the classroom and to provide a safe space for students to use their language/s. Students' language/s can be an important tool for learning and this should be actively encouraged in the classroom. Teachers can provide support for students learning SAE as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) by helping them make connections between their language/s and SAE by using both languages, also known as a "translanguaging" approach (García & Wei, 2014). Often this can be aided by other students or by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander educator within the school to build knowledge and understanding in the classroom. In the following account, Lillian explains how she used students' language and culture in the classroom to support students to build their mathematical knowledge.

A story from practice: Valuing home language and culture

Lillian was working with Aboriginal students in Far North Queensland. She noticed that students were not connecting with the mathematical resources that were available to them. She also noticed that the schooling environments were devoid of Aboriginal language and culture. She decided to develop a resource for a 'Closing the Gap' project that would develop mathematical concepts using Aboriginal language and culture.

The mathematical resource was called 'Building on Success', and it aimed to build on students' strengths as mathematicians. The language used in the resource was Kuku Yalangi which is the Aboriginal language of the Mossman Area. The main aims of this approach included:

1. To work with local Aboriginal Traditional Owners in a language-related project.
2. To promote Aboriginal culture in schooling environments, particularly in everyday classroom practice.
3. To ensure the preservation and continuation of Aboriginal languages.
4. To empower Aboriginal students through successful and engaging learning experiences and to promote a sense of belonging inside the classroom.
5. To develop community partnerships and involvement.

The key mathematical elements of 'Building on Success' were:

- Engaging before explaining – this stage employed a hands-on approach to learning, real-life examples, and making it enjoyable to provide students with opportunities to experience success (see Figure 9.1).

▲ Figure 9.1

Hands on approach

- Making mathematics experiential – this involved building language experiences and solving problems in collecting and organising of materials i.e. the "experience" as opposed to other methods of acquiring knowledge (see Figure 9.2).

▲ Figure 9.2

Building experiences

- Involving processes of investigation – this part provided opportunities for students to engage in the process and meaningfully connect with language (see Figure 9.3).

▲ Figure 9.3

Engaging with the process

- Implementing strategies for working mathematically – this involved using students who are naturally competent thinkers to share their strategies for working mathematically (see Figure 9.4).

▲ Figure 9.4

Implementing strategies

Building on Success enables teachers to provide engaging teaching and learning activities and to support the local language. It is beneficial for all students as they connect maths with learning language and culture. The response from teachers has been overwhelmingly positive and they are keen to embed language and culture in other learning areas.

Other teaching approaches and strategies that you can use in your classroom that support learning based on Indigenous language and culture include:

- Creating a language tree or similar classroom display with all the languages/cultural backgrounds of the students in your class (Berry & Hudson, 1997);
- Helping students create their personal family trees;
- Using 'Getting to know you' activities – e.g. draw the outline of a person and students colour the parts of their bodies that represent their different languages and cultures; student questionnaires – 'all about me'; using the iPad to create a personal video;
- Learning a few words in your students' languages and using them in the classroom;
- Adding words from your students' languages to your classroom displays and labels;
- Having students use their other language/s in the classroom to understand and explain their new learning to peers;
- Taking the time to learn about students' languages and cultures – often there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at the school who can help you or direct you to learning resources located in the school;
- Adopting a "translanguaging" approach (García & Wei, 2014) in your classroom (see Chapter 8);
- Listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional music and stories in classroom;
- Explore the AITSL Illustrations of Practice, particularly: Teaching an Indigenous language; Implementing an Indigenous language program; Community perspectives on an Indigenous language program; Traditional language and Early career Indigenous language teaching.

Sadly, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are often still impacted by the legacy of events or policies in their cultural history. Trauma caused by colonisation, including prohibiting the use of traditional languages and the practice of forced removal of children has had devastating consequences not only on the generations that experienced it, but also those that followed. This trauma, passed from generation to generation in families and communities, is known as 'intergenerational trauma'. Therefore, it is important to view the challenges faced by many Indigenous communities in the context of this history (including within the living memory of those who are still alive), as this still impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.

As educators we also need to be aware of the educational consequences of previous policies, such as Aboriginal people being barred from school and having to work from a very early age or, if enrolled in school, being unable to speak their language/s and practise their culture. Schooling environments can provoke past and intergenerational trauma, often resulting in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people avoiding school. Therefore, it is important for schools and teachers to build connections with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that attend their school, and with their broader community. This can be achieved by creating inclusive schooling environments that seek to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families, and communities in schooling (see Chapter 14).

There are many strategies to create inclusive schooling environments – ones that promote engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families, and the wider community. When implemented together they will serve to support those dealing with intergenerational trauma. These include:

- Raising the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags alongside the Australian one;
- Celebrating significant dates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including but not limited to National Sorry Day, the 1967 Referendum, National Reconciliation Week, Mabo Day and NAIDOC Week. Put these dates in the school calendar, write about them in the school newsletter, put posters up around the school, organise student learning activities for these dates;
- Including an 'acknowledgement of country', or if possible and appropriate – 'a welcome to country' for school functions and events;
- Including the local language/s or the language/s spoken by students in school displays and signage around the school. For example, 'welcome' and 'hello' in the different languages in the school office and on classroom doors, a greeting or word of the week in the school newsletter and/or assembly each week, translating the school rules into other languages;
- Building a relationship with the local elders or traditional owners in your area and seeking their input or involvement in your school;
- Establishing a committee to promote inclusion within your school;
- Hosting community events at your school so it is not just a 'school' but a part of the community;

- Holding parent–teacher afternoons in alternative locations that will encourage family attendance;
- Developing a School–Community Partnership Agreement; these agreements have been shown to have positive outcomes for students and schools (What Works, 2013);
- Explore the AITSL Illustrations of Practice, particularly respecting local culture, history, and language.

For teachers, there are many ways to make your classroom inclusive and to build relationships with your students and their families. As described in Chapter 7, building relationships with your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is one of the best ways to engage your students, their families, and the broader community in school. It is crucial for achieving positive personal, social, and educational outcomes for your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

A story from practice: Connecting with home

Carly worked at a school where many Aboriginal students were from a local Aboriginal Community, a 45-minute drive from the school. The students commuted by bus and it was difficult for parents, who either worked in the community or in town (in the opposite direction to the school), to become involved in school events or even attend parent–teacher afternoons. To overcome this and to promote community engagement, she created a video and played it for the community at an afterschool event held in the community. The video contained a vignette of each of the teachers greeting the parents and telling them about their classrooms, as well as images of their children in the classroom learning and playing in the playground. The event was very well attended with many children and their families including siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents coming along to the event. They greatly appreciated the opportunity to see 'in action' what school life was like for their children and the video was watched multiple times.

Here are some other strategies you can implement to achieve connections between your students and their families:

- Make your first contact with home a positive experience i.e., "I was proud of the way that … did … today. It shows me …" Continue to share positive experiences;
- Aim for regular casual conversations in preference to formal school meetings;
- Contact with home might be difficult, so find non-traditional means to connect with families outside school, such as at sporting events or organise to meet them in a convenient, neutral environment. This can mean travelling to local communities or perhaps sending messages through a Community Liaison Officer or a person in a similar role;
- Ask parents and caregivers about their children, i.e., what do I need to know about your child to empower them as a learner? What are our goals and how can we achieve these goals together?
- Teach your students about significant dates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with learning activities, and acknowledge and celebrate these dates in class;

- Include the local language/s or the language/s spoken by students in classroom displays;
- Become involved in local community life (where appropriate).

In an effort to build connections with home and promote engagement with schooling, Lillian formalised some of these ideas and developed a resource to achieve this (see the story describing this below). Whilst it might not be possible for an individual teacher to create such a resource, it is something that a group of teachers could work on together to implement.

A story from practice: Connecting with home

In her work Lillian often receives requests for activities that could serve to reinforce learning at home. In response, Antoinette Cole and the Cairns Catholic Education Learning and Teaching developed the T.A.L.King (Thinking, Acting, Learning, Knowing) Together Kit to promote parent and community involvement and home interaction; then it was Lillian's role to teach families how to use these kits and she worked together with them to achieve this. The T.A.L.King Together Kit looked at different ways that parents, families, and the community could engage with their children's schooling in a non-threatening way.

Each T.A.L.King Together Kit contained:

- Blackboard;
- Peoplescapes Number Names 1-10;
- Peoplescapes subitizing;
- Peoplescapes Numbers 1-10;
- Peoplescapes Ordinal Numbers 1-10;
- Threading Wombat Ordinal Numbers;
- Threading Koala Numbers 1-10;
- Circular Numbers 1-10;
- Foam Numbers 1-10;
- 10 Shells;
- 10 Counters;
- Number Ladder;
- Around the Home;
- At the Beach.

The T.A.L.King Together Kit was produced mostly to assist parents and caregivers of students in Pre-primary and Year 1. It builds on developing mathematical experiences that teachers are using in these classrooms. It includes activities to help students develop those mathematical concepts being learned at school. The T.A.L.King Together Kits aimed to:

- Investigate the role of oral language as a precursor to the development of literacy and numeracy understandings and skills;
- Monitor students in Prep/Year 1 as they engage in meaningful oral language experiences in literacy and numeracy;
- Identify key stages within transition from home to school;
- Adopt a socio-cultural pedagogical model for enhancing Prep/Year 1 students' oral language.

Families have responded well to the kit and commented on its effectiveness, describing how all the materials have provided successful learning experiences. Parents have also commented about how the increased engagement in the activities has provided opportunities for increased oral language and communication. They look forward to the next task cards each month, and parents have created their own learning activities as well.

Culturally responsive teaching

Knowing and valuing your students' home language/s and culture is not only imperative for building relationships with your students, it is also vital for your teaching, for successful implementation of the curriculum, and for undertaking appropriate assessment. Over the last few decades many terms have been employed to highlight the importance and the role that culture plays in learning. Terms such as 'culturally appropriate', 'culturally relevant' and 'culturally compatible'

have been used. For us, the term 'culturally responsive teaching' is preferred, as it highlights the relational and interactive processes involved in strengths-based teaching that is being advocated here (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467). The term 'culturally responsive teaching' was first coined by Cazden & Leggett (1981) and by Erickson & Mohatt (1982). More recently the idea has been expanded by Gay, who describes it this way:

> Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.
>
> (Gay, 2002, p. 106)

As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters.

According to Gay (2002) there are five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, ensuring the curriculum includes ethnic and culturally diverse content, demonstrating caring within positive learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

To effectively practise culturally responsive teaching, as we have described above, teachers must build relationships with their students and develop a knowledge and understanding of their home language/s and culture. The benefit of doing this is that the two are mutually compatible and serve to reinforce each other. In an Australian-based study involving teachers and community, Owens (2015) found that partnerships with the community and teachers valuing students' family and cultural heritage resulted in increased warmth and communication between school and community, which in turn impacted on the curriculum and teaching approaches used, which enhanced learning opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Another aspect of culturally responsive teaching is responding to ethnic diversity in the way that instruction is delivered (Gay, 2002). To this end, teachers need to adapt the curriculum and employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies in their classrooms.

Adapting the curriculum

As a teacher your role is to support equitable access to the Australian Curriculum for all learners. It is important to note that when students do not see themselves reflected in the classroom curriculum, they can find it difficult to engage (Borden, 2013). Therefore, as teachers we need to adapt the curriculum for our local communities so we can meet the diverse needs of our students – noting that there is a vast range of learning contexts throughout Australia. How do you go about

▼ Table 9.1

Access, curriculum and assessment questions in relation to equity (Stobart, 2005, p. 279)

Access questions	Curricular questions	Assessment questions
Who gets taught and by whom?	Whose knowledge is taught?	What knowledge is assessed and equated with achievement?
Are there differences in the resources available for different groups?	Why is it taught in a particular way to this particular group?	Are the form, content and mode of assessment appropriate for different groups and individuals?
What is incorporated from the cultures of those attending?	How do we enable the histories and cultures of people of color, and of women, to be taught in responsible and responsive ways? *Apple, 1989*	Is this range of cultural knowledge reflected in definitions of achievement? How does cultural knowledge mediate individuals' responses to assessment in ways which alter the construct being assessed? *Gipps and Murphy, 1994*

this? One way we have found useful is to consider the equity questions about access, curriculum, and assessment as raised by Stobart (2005, p. 279) as shown in Table 9.1.

Teachers need to carefully consider each of these questions in the context of their current classroom environment. Based on their answers they may need to adapt their lessons, the curriculum, and how they design assessments to ensure equity for their students. For example, in Table 9.2 we give some suggestion as to how this could be achieved.

In the story below, Carly describes how she incorporates access, curricular and assessment responses (shown in Table 9.2) to write her HASS unit to ensure culturally responsive teaching.

▼ Table 9.2

Suggested responses to improve equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Access response	Curricular response	Assessment response
Ensure students can use and access their additional language/s in the classroom to promote learning	Teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge (cross-curricular priority)	Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is assessed and equated with achievement.
Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the school community and broader community	Teach knowledge in different ways, incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies, for example, the 8 ways of learning (Yunkaporta, 2009)	Consider non-traditional modes of assessment that still adequately demonstrate knowledge and understanding (for example, how can new technologies be incorporated to demonstrate knowledge and understanding?)
Invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guest speakers with specialist knowledge	Learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, history, and culture to ensure responsive teaching	
Invite students to share their cultural knowledge		

A story from practice: Culturally responsive teaching

Carly was teaching the HASS curriculum to a multi-age class of Aboriginal students in remote Australia. She first needed to address the challenges of working with a multi-age class, including what content and skills to cover. After careful consideration she decided that the Year 1, 2, 3 HASS Curriculum presented themes that were sufficiently similar to allow for shared learning experiences, but at the same time allowed for adequate differentiation according to year level and ability level of the students. The thematic focus was past, present, and future in the local Aboriginal community.

There were four key shared learning experiences:

1. An Elder visited the class and spoke to them in language about her life in the past – the games they played, foods they ate, their shelter and the first time she encountered a 'white' person;
2. An Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW) that worked in the school visited the class and spoke to them about life for her generation (the next generation from the Elder in the last visit). She spoke of life on the mission – the games, the food and shelter, as well the experience of returning to Country;
3. An exploration of cultural artefacts and photos. The school housed a range of cultural artefacts and photos of the pasts that spanned each generation, showing how life had changed in terms of food sources and shelter;
4. A class excursion on Country to build shelter from the natural environment as was done in the past. Students were taught the relevant skills by community members.

These shared learning experiences provided students with the opportunity to build a rich understanding of key content in the HASS learning area. Assessment of learning was differentiated to enable students to successfully meet the achievement standards for their relevant year level in the HASS learning area.

There was a wide range of ongoing assessment tasks:

Year 1 – Picture sort into 'past' and 'present', explain how life has changed according to pictures, label map of community, describe community using map and directional/location terms, share stories of past and present using terminology to denote passing of time.

Year 2 – Choose one of the guest speakers and describe their significance in the local community, explain the significance of moving back to Country (i.e. why places are important to people), categorise and sort pictures according to food, shelter, entertainment, pose questions about the past based on photos and cultural artefacts, compare ways of doing things in the past and present (i.e. making food (flour), providing shelter, recreational activities), create a labelled map of the community, create a narrative about the past (present and future) using language to describe direction, location, and the passing of time.

Year 3 – Create a timeline (using pictures and cultural artefacts) of the recent past from first contact, missions, and return to Country, identify the individuals and events that played a significant role (label sources of information), create a table of continuity and change in the community, create maps of the community changing over time using basic cartographic conventions, describe aspects of the community that have changed and remained the same over time using timelines, maps, and tables as support.

The above provides an example of how the Australian curriculum can be contextualised to become relevant for the students in your classroom. In this example, local Aboriginal knowledge was taught to meet the demands of the Australian Curriculum and the HASS learning area achievement standards in multiple year levels. Different ways of learning and knowing were incorporated through interactions with community members and the local natural environment. Most importantly, students enjoyed the learning that took place. They delighted in poring over old photos and making family connections with who was who (a particular highlight for them was a photo of an Elder when they were much younger with dreadlocks wearing flared pants and playing guitar!). They learned cultural knowledge from community members and were not only very successful in building their shelters, they learnt a great deal about the past (see Figure 9.5).

▲ Figure 9.5

Students taking a 'nap' in the houses they built

In this way, Carly was able to teach all the requisite content descriptors in the Australian Curriculum and the students were able to meet the Achievement Standards appropriate to their year level and Aboriginal knowledge was equated with achievement.

Here are some other strategies you can use as a teacher to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in your classroom:

- Consider Stobart's (2005) equity questions about access, curriculum, and assessment;
- Adapt the curriculum and lesson delivery at assessment to meet local context;
- Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is taught, valued, and equated with achievement;
- Emphasise and promote the ways that Traditional Owners and community members can add value to the school and the classroom;
- Extend special invitations to Elders and community members to join in not only significant events but all school events, to have a positive presence in the school community;
- Use alternative or non-literacy-based forms of assessment in the classroom, e.g., the use of technology and other ways of representing learning.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies

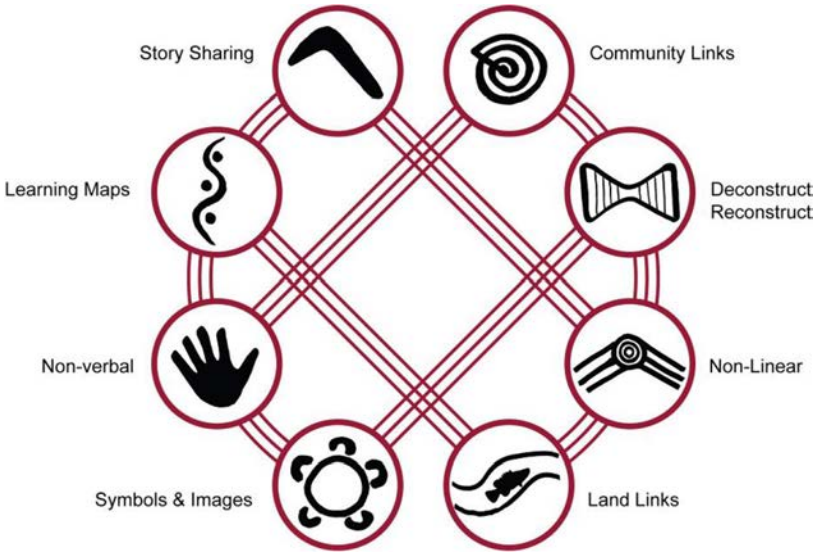
As noted in previous chapters, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students share a cultural worldview that often stands in stark contrast to that of the Western

culture of schooling (Berry & Hudson, 1997; Malcolm & Grote, 2007). Teachers must include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies in their teaching to ensure equity of access to learning for these students as discussed above. It is also important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies are implemented from a culturally responsive viewpoint. That is, not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the same and just using one pedagogy is not the answer. Teachers need to learn about the local context and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their class in order to respond to their needs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies provide options for doing this, but they need to be employed in a responsive way to avoid a reductionist view (Donald & Rattansi, 1992; McConaghy, 2000; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Due to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories, languages, cultures, and experiences, it is important that all learning needs are contextualised within the local environment.

One example of a pedagogical approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is the 'two-way' or 'both ways' approach that was implemented through the Department of Education, Western Australian with their Tracks to Two-Way Learning program (2012). 'Two-way' cultural learning involves learning about both cultures, and valuing both equally. Because of the differing languages and cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teachers often find that cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications can be commonplace in the classroom (Eades, 1984). 'Two-way' cultural learning provides a bridge to explore these cultural and linguistic differences to aid mutual understanding and most importantly, learning in the classroom.

Teachers may also have access to the CSIRO's Inquiry for Indigenous Science Students (I2S2) in their school. This program also employs a 'two-way' learning approach that is designed to illustrate "how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples used high-level science inquiry skills within cultural practices" and highlights "the links between Indigenous and Western science knowledge and ways of working" (CSIRO, 2019). The program is based on the premise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are Australia's and the world's first scientists. This premise can be explored in many other subject areas as well, particularly English and Art (for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first story tellers or the first artists), to produce some very rich teaching and learning experiences. An example (Fire: a burning question) of this program in action is shown on the Australian Curriculum website in their Illustrations of practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (ACARA).

The '8 ways of Aboriginal learning' (Yunkaporta, 2009) is designed to meet the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, the strategies employed are beneficial for all students. As such, the framework presents an opportunity to include Aboriginal perspectives whilst simultaneously catering for a wide range of diverse learning needs in your classroom. Because it is a pedagogical approach, teachers can continue to teach learning area content while at the same time embedding Aboriginal perspectives in their lessons. The pedagogical framework is expressed as eight interconnected



▲ Figure 9.6

8 ways of Aboriginal learning (Yunkaporta, 2009)

strategies for learning (shown in Figure 9.6). There are "8 ways to start the process… Tell a story. Make a plan. Think and do. Draw it. Take it outside. Try a new way. Watch first, then do. Share it with others" (NSW Department of Education, 2020).

Yunkaporta's (2009) techniques include:

- Learning through narrative;
- Planning and visualising explicit processes;
- Working non-verbally with self-reflective, hands-on methods;
- Learning through images, symbols, and metaphors;
- Learning through place-responsive, environmental practice;
- Using indirect, innovative, and interdisciplinary approaches;
- Modelling and scaffolding by working from wholes to parts;
- Connecting learning to local values, needs, and knowledge.

It is also important for teachers to consider the preferred interaction styles of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Teachers need to find ways of accommodating their preferred interaction styles in the classroom to cater for their students' learning needs. Frequently, the interaction styles of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not compatible with the expectations of classroom teachers, which again, can lead to breakdowns in communication (see Chapter 8). Prolonged or enforced eye contact and specific types of

questioning can result in feelings of shame (Harkins, 1990) for some students. These situations are not necessary to teaching and there are other ways of doing things in the classroom that focus instead on building students' confidence in a safe and secure environment. Using indirect questioning or other means of determining student knowledge and understanding have been shown to be effective when teaching some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Galloway, 2003). For example, instead of beginning the lesson with teacher-directed questioning, the lesson could begin with a small group interactive task that revises learning – and this could be written, oral, or completed through drawing or another type of visual representation, such as using iPads, or acted out, etc. Additionally, like all students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students respond well to positive reinforcement in the classroom (Galloway, 2003). This involves actively making the effort to avoid classroom situations which may initiate or invoke shame; instead teachers should work to ensure there are plenty of opportunities for success and positive reinforcement.

A story from practice: A maths lesson employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies

In her role, Lillian frequently demonstrates maths lessons that employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies. This is one example from a Prep classroom. The lesson focused on the following content descriptors from the Australian curriculum for mathematics:

- ACMNA 001 – Establish understanding of the language and processes of counting by naming numbers in sequences, initially to and from 20, moving from any starting point;
- ACMNA 289 – Compare and order and make correspondences between collections initially to 20, and explain meaning.

First, Lillian read the book Cassowary Coast – Count on Country by Pamela Galeano and talked with students about ways of counting in the local Jiddabul language. She then taught students the following key words in Jiddabul language that they would use throughout the lesson:

- Maui – food;
- Mandalay (pronounced man-da-lanj) – children's games;
- Yunggal – number for 1.

Next students engaged in mandalay (children's games) for learning about numbers. A blue mat was placed on the floor with maui (in the form of fish) spread across it as shown in Figure 9.7. The maui had number names, numerals and quantities shown on them. Students were asked to engage it different mandalay, such as:

- 'Find another maui like this one';
- 'Show me maui 8';
- 'What maui did I point to?';
- 'Find and catch all the maui for yunggal';
- 'Find all the maui for 10'.

These mandalay were extended to include sequencing, counting backwards and forwards to and from 20 – starting from any point. Because there were many different mandalay that could be played, it was very easy to differentiate learning according to the students' needs and specifically target the students' current ability level.

At the end of the lesson, students engaged in a 'yarn about' their reflections of their learning, sharing it with each other.

Therefore, in this lesson Lillian was able to teach students about Aboriginal language and culture while teaching key mathematical content. Her lesson also included many elements of Yunkaporta's (2009) 8 pedagogical ways for creating an engaging learning experience for all students.

▲ Figure 9.7

A student participating in Mandalany to learn key mathematical concepts

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies are not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, which is a common misconception. They represent an opportunity for teachers to expand their teaching repertoire to cater for the diversity that is present within any Australian classroom. They also help to provide a balance of perspectives in learning, rather than privileging Western Eurocentric knowledge and cultural norms. Exploring the different knowledges and ways of learning that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies embody will enrich the education of all, which is at the heart of the Australian Professional Teacher Standard 2.4.

Here are other ways you can incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and pedagogies into your teaching toolkit:

- Use dialogue or 'yarning circles' in your classroom (Mills, Sunderland & Davis, 2013);
- Employ 'two-way' learning in the classroom;
- Employ Yunkaporta's (2009) '8 Ways of Learning';
- Find out whether you can access CSIRO's Inquiry for Indigenous Science Students (I2S2);
- Explore the new science elaborations addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority;
- Consider the preferred interaction styles of your students and ways to accommodate these styles in your teaching, such as the use of interactive tasks in preference to direct questioning;
- Use positive reinforcement;
- Provide opportunities for student success;

- Always contextualise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies and perspectives to the students in your classroom;
- Explore the AITSL Illustrations of practice, particularly 8 ways of Learning and Fire stick farming.

Empowering learners

This chapter is about teaching and learning. Effective teaching empowers learners. This can be achieved by holding high expectations and developing approaches in your classroom such as Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

High expectations

This book takes a strengths-based approach to the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One way to achieve this is by holding high expectations for your students to overcome barriers to learning imposed by deficit perspectives (Ionn, 1995). Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis, & Bray (2018) provide guidance for teachers to enact high-expectations relationships. Key to establishing high expectations is building an understanding of the student's personal circumstances and developing responsive strategies that will enable that student to achieve the high expectations set for them. This is what Sarra et al. (2018) label 'High-expectations relationship (enacting)' in Table 9.3. It is important to note that 'high expectations' is not treating all students the same, irrespective of personal circumstances. This is what Sarra et al. (2018) label 'High-expectations rhetoric (believing)'. Table 9.3 from Sarra et al. (2018, p. 7) clearly illustrates what high-expectation relationships look like in the context of schools. It is important to note in the examples that high-expectations does not just relate to teacher expectations of students, but rather is about how the teacher conducts themselves in all facets of their role as teacher and their responses to various situations that present.

High expectations are vital to improving school attendance and academic achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Bissett, 2012; Harrison, 2011; Milgate & Giles-Browne, 2013; Sarra, 2011; Sullivan, Jorgensen, Boaler & Lerman, 2013). Whilst many teachers may attest to holding high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, it is the communication of these high expectations that is significant to achievement. One way to formalise this and to promote accountability between all parties can be through the development of PLPs.

Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs)

PLPs are designed to recognise the strengths, needs and goals of individual students and map the pathway to achieving these goals (What Works, 2011) (also see Chapter 13 for a description of a Strengths Analysis approach). They are expected to be both a collaborative and an active process (DEEWR, 2011). PLPs have

▼ Table 9.3

Examples of the difference between high expectations rhetoric and a high-expectations relationship (Sarra, Spillman, Jackson, Davis and Bray, 2018, p. 7)

Situation	Low-expectations response	High-expectations rhetoric (believing)	High-expectations relationship (enacting)
A student arrives at school without a uniform.	Ignore the absence of the uniform, believing that confrontation is not worth the time, effort or potential conflict.	Send the student home for not following the school rules.	Talk with the student about why they are out of uniform Engage in a conversation with parents/carers about options, for example, the school providing uniforms if cost is an issue.
A student is not attending school regularly.	Refrain from talking to the student or contacting parents or carers—It is not the teacher's role to get students to school.	Suspend or punish the student for not adhering to school policy.	Work with the student to explore the reasons affecting attendance Talk with the family to work together to find solutions.
A student enters your classroom visibly upset because of relationship difficulties with another student.	Ignore the student, or state that the demonstrated behaviour is 'ridiculous' and unnecessary.	Insist that students keep their problems 'out of the classroom' because everyone is there to learn'.	Talk to the student to determine what support they need in order to engage in the class or if another option is appropriate Make a time to talk to the student further.
Two students are fighting in the playground.	Stop the fight and follow the school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour, thinking that it is typical of those students and they are on their way to a suspension.	Follow the school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour and divorce yourself of any further responsibility.	Stop the fight, follow the school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour and actively engage with both students individually and together to identify the cause of the fight and address those issues. Encourage students to reflect on their behaviour and accept responsibility for their part.
An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander parent or Elder complains about how elements of Indigenous history or cultural studies are being taught in your classroom.	Listen to the complaint and decide to refrainfrom teaching Indigenous studies again.	Listen to the complaint and respond that as the teacher you are responsible for what is taught and that parents/elders should not interfere.	Engage in an open conversation with the parent/elder to better understand their concerns. apologise for the distress. Consider options to address their concerns. for example, invite parent/elder to contribute to future lessons on Indigenous studies.
Students are heard using racist language when talking about a particular individual or group in the school (or in society).	Pretend not to hear the comments, as the situation is too complex, or it is harmless because it does not involve physical violence or casually tell the students to 'cut it out' without any follow-up.	Confront the students and implement school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour.	Intervene and explain that their language is inappropriate, implement school's procedures for unacceptable behaviour and organise a time to meet each student individually to discuss motivating factors and potential harm of their comments and attitudes.
A student refuses to participate in or complete a classroom. homework or assessment task that it is 'too hard'.	Accept the student's attitude, and make concessions for their inaction.	Demand that the student completes all set tasks and outline the consequences if student does not comply.	Discuss their concerns and explain the importance of the task, work with the student to understand what 'too hard' means to them and which parts of the task need additional scaffolding and if there are other forms of support that the student may require in order to complete the task.
Teacher shows a video in class.	Show a video loosely tied to the curriculum without an introduction to the purpose and context and without follow-up activities as a way of simply keeping the students quiet in the classroom.	Use the video to deliver the established curriculum inflexibly believing this will deliver on high expectations. with no consideration for student interests, capabilities or preferences.	Develop an understanding of students' interests and cultural backgrounds to deliver curriculum based on culturally responsive pedagogies

evolved from an MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) recommendation to "ensure that schools, in partnership with parents/caregivers, deliver personalised learning to all Indigenous students that includes targets against key learning outcomes and incorporates family involvement strategies" (DEEWR, 2011, p. 8); all school systems and sectors in Australia agreed to this recommendation in 2008.

What Works (2011, p. 4) suggests key questions for developing PLPs:

1. Where is the student now?
2. Where should the student be?
3. How will they get to where they should be?
4. How will be know when they get there?

It is recommended that these questions be integrated into the teaching and learning cycle of assessment of student learning in order to establish goals for learning, and to plan for appropriate teaching and learning approaches (What Works, 2011, p.4). As with all we have described, how this will look in each school is dependent on the local context. School systems and sectors across Australia provide implementation advice and guidance for their schools. Beyond specific jurisdiction advice, there are two key general guides to assist schools in implementing a process for developing PLPs:

- DEEWR (2011). Guide to developing Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – A professional learning resource.
- What Works (2011). The Work Program: Core Issues 10. Using Personalised Learning Plans.

A story from practice: Developing PLPs

Carly developed PLPs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the schools where she worked and in doing so found some processes to be more effective than others she had tried.

At one school, the whole-school approach involved visually displaying goals. Within the classroom they built displays with a picture of each student; beside their picture the students had a bucket and in it they had a collection of juggling balls. Each ball had a different goal on it, and when they achieved this goal, it was placed in the air and it looked like the students were juggling the balls – that is, the goals they had achieved. Each student knew their goals and when they were working in class, Carly would put their relevant goal on their desk to remind them of what they were working towards. The students delighted in achieving their goals, their family members and the wider community enjoyed coming into the school and seeing the pictures of the students achieving their goals. This created a cycle of success, where success led to further success. Students were more willing to give it a go because they had experienced success in the past. In this approach, the paperwork for the teachers was not onerous, they simply discussed long-term goals with their students and their families. Then as teachers, they broke the long-term goals down into little achievable steps, which were the goals communicated and explained to the students. In the PLPs, teachers wrote key strategies for achieving student goals that were included in the teacher planning. Because, the PLPs were being communicated through the visual display and the strategies were in the teachers' planning, it wasn't a document that was completed, filed and forgotten; it was an active process that was at the forefront of what teachers and students did every day.

In contrast to this successful situation, at another school where Carly worked, the PLPs were an exhaustive document that took time to complete. Furthermore, it was not completed in the presence of the students or explained to them, rather it was sent home for the caregiver/s to sign and return to the school. The students were not aware of the goals being set and teachers were begrudgingly completing this paperwork as a school requirement. Clearly this was not an effective process.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have endeavoured to highlight the importance of getting to know your students and their families, and the local community context in which you might be teaching. Without knowledge of your students, their families, and the community, you cannot implement culturally responsive teaching, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies, hold high expectations nor develop useful PLPs. This knowledge should underpin everything that you do or don't do in the classroom. The title of this chapter – 'There is no one right way, but there are right things to do', speaks to this approach. How you teach should always be in response to the students in your classroom. Therefore, you need to get to know them first. Once you know your students, it is easy to do the right things in the right way for these students.

Reflective questions

1. What challenges might you anticipate (personal or otherwise) in getting to know your students, families, and communities? Suggest some ways you can overcome your identified challenges.
2. How can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies be employed in responsive ways to avoid a reductionist view?
3. What does it mean to hold 'high expectations' for students and how can this sometimes come into conflict with 'empathy and understanding'? How do you think you can achieve a useful balancing act?

We will introduce ourselves to position ourselves within this chapter:

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