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**Paper Title** What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in North Queensland Say About Effective Teaching Practices: Measuring Teacher and Understanding Pedagogical Cultural Competence

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*Objectives or purposes:* Similar to most Indigenous peoples, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait (Indigenous Australians) people of northern Queensland presently participate in a school system that has been drawn from the predominantly white Australian culture. Although Indigenous staff work in schools, especially elementary schools, the majority of teachers, principals, and school operations administrators are non-Aboriginal and the curricula and pedagogy of classrooms are based on models derived from the dominant culture. Because of this, school practices such as the content of curricula and pedagogical practices have both intentionally and unintentionally denied the inclusion of those aspects of culture that have value and are important to children (Bishop, 1996). With the imperative to address issues of inequity in terms of Indigenous student achievement in education, Catholic Education has established an imperative to move towards an educational system grounded in culture-based intentions to address inequity in student achievement and validate community practice and aspiration. The study described here presents the outcomes of all phases of a four phase research initiative which arose in response to this cultural denial to support a move towards a better understanding of classroom practices that have value in the learning of Indigenous students. The following questions guide the four phases of our research: (1) What do Indigenous students and their parents identify as the pedagogical practices influencing their (child's) learning? (2) What are the statistically validated factors that are identified as composites of a culturally competent teacher for Indigenous students in this context, and to what extent are these represented in Catholic Education classrooms? (3) What teaching behaviours are identified as statistically significant in influencing Indigenous students' learning and (4) What teacher thinking processes are influential in promoting teaching practice shifts towards cultural competence?

*Perspective(s) or theoretical framework:* We define this research, informed by the ideas and explanations of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them (Gay, 2000). Although several studies have focused on the identification of the critical elements of instruction influencing the school success of Indigenous students in Australia (e.g., Osborne, 1991, 1996), few have focused on grounding the studies in the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait students themselves and their Indigenous educators. Further, none have tested these suggested claims, despite a call from the Indigenous community for such (Craven et al., 2007). Following the protocols used by Bishop et al. (2003) in Aotearoa-New Zealand with their ongoing *Te Kotahitanga* project researchers have identified through their conversations with Māori students a variety of practices that contribute to both positive learning environments and student success in learning, practices located mainly in students' home culture. By so doing, they have developed an "Effective Teaching Profile" for teachers of Māori students based on operationalizing interaction and pedagogical practices that students believe address and promote their educational achievement. These practices have then been tested through quantitative methods to determine the efficacy of such practices. Bishop et al.'s (2003) research determines from the perceptions of Aboriginal students teaching practices that contribute to their success as learners and use students' voice to question the protocols of mainstream classrooms and, in response, promote a dynamic and synergistic relationship between home and community culture and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This questioning ultimately and purposely "problematizes" teaching, upsets the orthodoxy of classrooms, and encourages teachers to ask about the nature of student-teacher relationship, their teaching, the curriculum, and schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1995). By creating this disequilibrium, educators are pushed to seek resolution of these issues to move their classrooms to become more *culturally responsive* as they employ a culturally preferred pedagogy. As suggested by Gay (2000), culturally responsive teachers *respond* to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance and learning styles of students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. They teach to and through the strengths of their students, reducing the discontinuity between the home cultures of these students and the social interaction patterns of the classroom (Kanu, 2002). The underlying premise of culture-based education is that the educational experiences provided for children *should*

reflect, validate, and promote their culture and language. These experiences should be reflected not only in the management and operation of schools but also in the curricula and programs implemented and pedagogies used. It assumes that students come to school with a whole set of beliefs, skills, and understandings formed from their experience in their world, and that the role of the school is not to ignore or replace these understandings and skills, but to recognize the teaching practices and understandings within the cultural context and affirm these in formal classroom settings (Osborne, 1996). This advocacy has long been held but tragically ignored in Australian schools. The research currently being conducted seeks to understand from students and parents what classroom environments and teacher practices look like that are, indeed, reflective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' preferences. Further it seeks to determine through quantitative measures the efficacy of asserted claims.

*Methods and modes of inquiry:* As purported by Bevan-Brown (1998), our overall aim of this research was motivated by our desire to better inform and benefit Indigenous students and their teachers to see the realization of Aboriginal and Torres Strait aspirations for education. Bishop et al. (2003) qualitative and quantitative project, grounded in the domain of culturally responsive pedagogy and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), have provided a foundation for both the research questions and methodology central to this study. The methodology for the overall research project is informed by participatory action research which draws upon the collective aspirations of each [Aboriginal school] community (i.e. its teachers, students, parents, administrators, and supporting elders) as researchers in collaboration with the authors to (a) identify common goals, (b) implement strategies for achieving these goals, (c) evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to achieve set goals, and, finally, (d) respond to the evaluations with further courses of action. Because the project overall endeavours to critically identify and change patterns of action of local institutions in response to locally identified goals, including the pedagogy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait schools and their classrooms, it is emancipatory as well. Further, since the project includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, the project focuses on how Indigenous methodologies inform each stage and the overall research process.

*Data sources, evidence:* The presentation focuses on all phases of a four phase research process, the first qualitative, the second and third quantitative and the fourth qualitative. In the first phase, we conducted (a) individual interviews with 23 grade 9-12 students in a further six schools, (b) group interviews with 14 Grade 9-12 students and (c) individual and group interviews with 24 parents and caregivers. In the interviews, we asked questions that focused on students (or parents and caregivers from their prior experiences) identifying (a) the last time they felt they had been successful in school, (b) what their teachers did to help them to learn, (c) what was happening in their classroom when they were learning best, and (d) what they would change about their teachers' teaching or what should happen in their classrooms to assist them in their learning. We also observed six teachers identified by Indigenous students, their teaching peers, principals, and us as successful classroom teachers who created positive learning environments for Indigenous students. Further, we interviewed eight teachers currently employed by Catholic Education to ask them to consider teacher, student, and classroom characteristics that promoted positive learning environments and facilitated engagement and learning. Finally, we shared in five Catholic Education schools interview results with students and with teachers at a staff meeting. All teachers were invited to respond to students' comments about teacher behaviours that influenced their learning. We verified transcribed sections of the conversations as accurate through our conversations with each other as researchers and with the students and their teachers. Thematic analysis was conducted individually by researchers and, then, collectively. In our analysis we looked for 'common themes' and across all student populations, both the larger Indigenous population and then smaller subsets of this population in terms of whether there were tendencies amongst Aboriginal as compared to Torres Strait Islander or remote, rural or urban Indigenous students. From this information, in the second phase, we developed an Effective Teaching Profile (EFT, which we call a Pedagogy of

Consequence) based upon the phase one findings. The profile was then, using Rasch analysis, statistically validated by 122 teachers the majority being elementary (k-6) teachers. From this validation exercise, we compared the cultural competence of elementary teachers with those from secondary. In the third phase, we statistically identified through the use of the EFT in 62 classrooms, teaching behaviours that had significance in the learning of Indigenous students. We closed the research in the forth phase by investigating the process of how teachers adjusted their practice in correspondence with the assertions of the EFT.

*Results and/or substantiated conclusions:* In our presentation at AERA, we will present the findings from all phases, but will emphasize the statistical aspects because of the dearth of quantitative data verifying the significance of CRP. That is, we will start with the student and parent responses, teacher comments and classroom observations sub-grouped according to identifiable themes. Highlighted will be the dominant themes apparent in the observations, discussions and questionnaires. As well, we will emphasize the difference and similarities in the participant themes, especially between students and parents. Most importantly emphasis will be placed on students' tendency to emphasize specific teacher actions influencing learning such as (1) communication patterns; (2) content; (3) social interaction patterns; (4) classroom environment characteristics; (5): ecological characteristics (degree to which the classroom represents or utilizes local resources, including community members; and (6) literacy development practices. In contrast, parents' responses primarily focused on wanting teachers to be aware and understand the systemic issues associated with socio-political 'past' of northern Queensland and parents' perceived inability to influence the educational system and, in particular, teachers' beliefs and actions that could work more positively for their child's educational success. Further, parents commonly mentioned the 'code switching' their children experienced in their child's transition from home to school and that effective teachers made provision for this in classrooms. Effective teachers communicated clearly and concisely with their students. Their communication in English was appropriately abbreviated and direct. When teaching, they under-talked rather than over-talked. Their communication simplified appropriately to the language proficiency of the student. In communicating abstract ideas, effective teachers fostered learning by using multiple instructional strategies such as direct instruction and modelling. They reconsidered and changed their communication practice in light of how students responded to their teaching. In the second phase of the research, the Rasch analysis statistically confirmed that the instrument measured a unidimensional latent trait, culturally responsive pedagogy. Seven subscales, initially qualitatively determined, were statistically confirmed. The instrument proved suitable to measure nuances in pedagogy and to detect significant differences between elementary and secondary teachers. Evident within the analysis was the limited attention of secondary teachers in comparison to elementary teachers to culturally responsive pedagogy.

*Scientific or scholarly significance of the study.* In the third phase of the study we identified statistically significant teacher behaviour influences on students' learning. These included teacher's explicit attention to (1) the learning focus; (2) students' literacy requirements; (3) inclusion of contextually relevant subject matter; (4) lesson delivery and pace that allowed for demonstration, modelling and time for mastery and (5) a learning environment grounded in an imperative to foster teacher-student mutual trust and respect. In the final and ongoing forth phase of the project we are seeking to understand what causes teachers to adjust practice to a CRP.

This study is very important to those working within Indigenous settings, especially in settings where regard must be given to altering the pedagogical practices of classrooms. This study is the first study of its kind in Australia grounded in eliciting from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students their learning preferences and then using this for quantitative identification of teaching practices potentially salient to Indigenous students. Culture-based education *should* and *must* reflect, validate, and promote the culture and language of the Indigenous peoples of northern Queensland. These experiences must be reflected not only in the management and operation of schools but also in the curricula and programs implemented and *pedagogies* utilized (Craven, 2007). Such is the nature

of culturally responsive teaching – using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them. Such is the challenge the outcomes of this study place on the classroom educators and those involved in determining the educational policies and practices that influence the education of their Indigenous students.

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