CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT FOR AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS STUDENTS: WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SHOW?

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Abstract

Teacher responses to Indigenous student behaviour, when couched in cultural mismatch and lack of cultural understanding, can lead to overrepresentation of Indigenous students in negative indicators associated with student behaviour. To better understand appropriate strategies to support the behaviour of Australian Indigenous students a review of the published peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed literature was undertaken. The review revealed a number of themes which underpin appropriate Indigenous student behavior support: an understanding of Self and the Other and power relations without a deficit paradigm; particular personal qualities of the teacher and the ability to create effective relationships with Indigenous students. In addition, for classroom behaviour support to be successful teachers should also know or be willing to learn: the culture and characteristics of students, their learning strengths, successful pedagogy for Indigenous students and proactive behaviour support strategies. Teachers should also use culturally based behaviour support and management strategies and create links with community. The review also revealed that while the literature offered numerous suggestions, Australian research evidence is lacking a quantum of empirically based evidence.

Background

Indigenous students are overrepresented in indicators associated with student behavior: student suspensions (Mills & McGregor, 2014; Partington, Waugh, & Forrest, 2001; Stehbens, Anderson, & Herbert, 1999), attendance (Auditor General of Queensland, 2012; Keddie, Gowlett, Mills, Monk, & Renshaw, 2013), exclusions (Partington et al., 2001), retention (Bain, 2011) and low achievement (Stehbens et al., 1999). While data is not openly available for Queensland, in New South Wales state schools, where Indigenous students constitute 6.1 percent of the overall student population, they account for 23 percent of long term suspensions (Mills & McGregor, 2014). In one Western Australian school, Aboriginal students were three times more likely to be suspended from school than non-Aboriginal students. Also, perceptions existed among the Noongar families that non-Aboriginal students received shorter suspension or no suspension for the same offence and that behaviours were pathologised, rather than giving Aboriginal students equal access to restorative practices (Gillan, 2008).

Considering that the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers require teachers to "Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011), one would expect that enacted curriculum, including teaching practice and behaviour support, *must* demonstrate links between school and the everyday realities of Indigenous Peoples life practices and cultures (Sarra, 2011a).

Before discussing this topic, two things must be considered. First, there are two very distinct Indigenous cultures in Australia. Most of the published literature is written for Aboriginal culture and is often assumed to hold for Torres Strait Islander culture as well. Little is written by Torres Strait Islanders, or from a Torres Strait Islander perspective, which is problematic (Nakata, 1995a, 1995b, 2007; Osborne, 1996). Also, within these two cultures each cultural or family group has its own

practices (Bamblett, 1985), so students come from diverse backgrounds and cannot all be grouped together (Nakata, 2007) although they may share some common traits (Gollan & Malin, 2012). Teachers must respond to each student's need in context, rather than blindly applying strategies that may not meet the specific needs of individual students in specific classroom contexts. The notion: "What form or level of learning is called for by this topic, for this student, in this situation?" [Emphasis from Pinto] (Noddings, 2003, p. 244) applies here. The second point is that history must be considered as the reader negotiates information describing Indigenous cultures in Australia (Osborne, 1996). Accurate recounting of history (Bottoms, 2013) helps to situate information about education in communities as Shaw (2009) did in Aurukun and Christie (1987b) did in Millingimbi. "One must acknowledge also that Aboriginal attitudes, and often Aboriginal living conditions have been determined by two hundred years of White cultural and economic dominance of Aboriginal cultural values, which are alien to non-Aboriginal society" (Bamblett, 1985, p. 35). The alternative is an attitude of deficit theorising, which ignores history and places the problems with students and families rather than looking at systems or schools or teachers (Griffiths, 2011).

Method

This literature review adopted Randolph's (2009) approach, which likens the process to the stages following primary research. That is, it includes the stages of (1) problem formulation; (2) data collection; (3) data evaluation; (4) analysis and interpretation and, finally, (5) presentation. The first stage was problem formulation. The problem was identifying specific teacher actions purported to impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student behaviour and examining how and if such teacher actions had been empirically evaluated. This review had two foci (Randolph, 2009), (1) the identification of teacher actions that are allegedly influencing student behaviour; and (2) an assessment of the methodological approaches used to determine the influence of teacher actions on student behaviour.

The second stage in problem formulation was determining the criteria for inclusion of literatures which are pertinent to the review's focus goals and coverage (Randolph, 2009). The criteria for classifying and including- literature in this review were: (1) Publications covering International and/ or Australian based behaviour support and management which (2) mentioned an Indigenous or marginalised primary or secondary school context; (3) literature that claimed to improve behaviour support or management of Indigenous students; (4) literature which was peer and non-peer reviewed and (5) literature that made provision for including Indigenous voice in the suggested actions (Figure 1).

Once a publication was deemed eligible for inclusion, based on the research goals and foci, it was analysed and the essential features of the publication were classified. The resulting analysis produced findings which were grouped under a range of themes. The final step in the analyses resulted in further sub-classification, into complementary and rival findings or claims. Conclusions were based on synthesising these emergent threads. This paper presents a brief introduction to the emergent themes arising from the review.

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Search parameters first level

1. International
2. Peer or non-peer reviewed
3. Primary or secondary schooling
4. Claims about improved BS practice.

No mention of Indigenous/ minority students –publication excluded

Some recognition of Indigenous/ minority students

International literature

Australian literature

1. International advice literature

- Significant contributions

2. International empirical research

- Common themes

4. Australian advice literature

- Common themes

Australian empirical research

- Common themes

3. Methodology employed

5. Studies describing implicit behaviour support

- Common themes

6. Studies describing explicit behaviour support
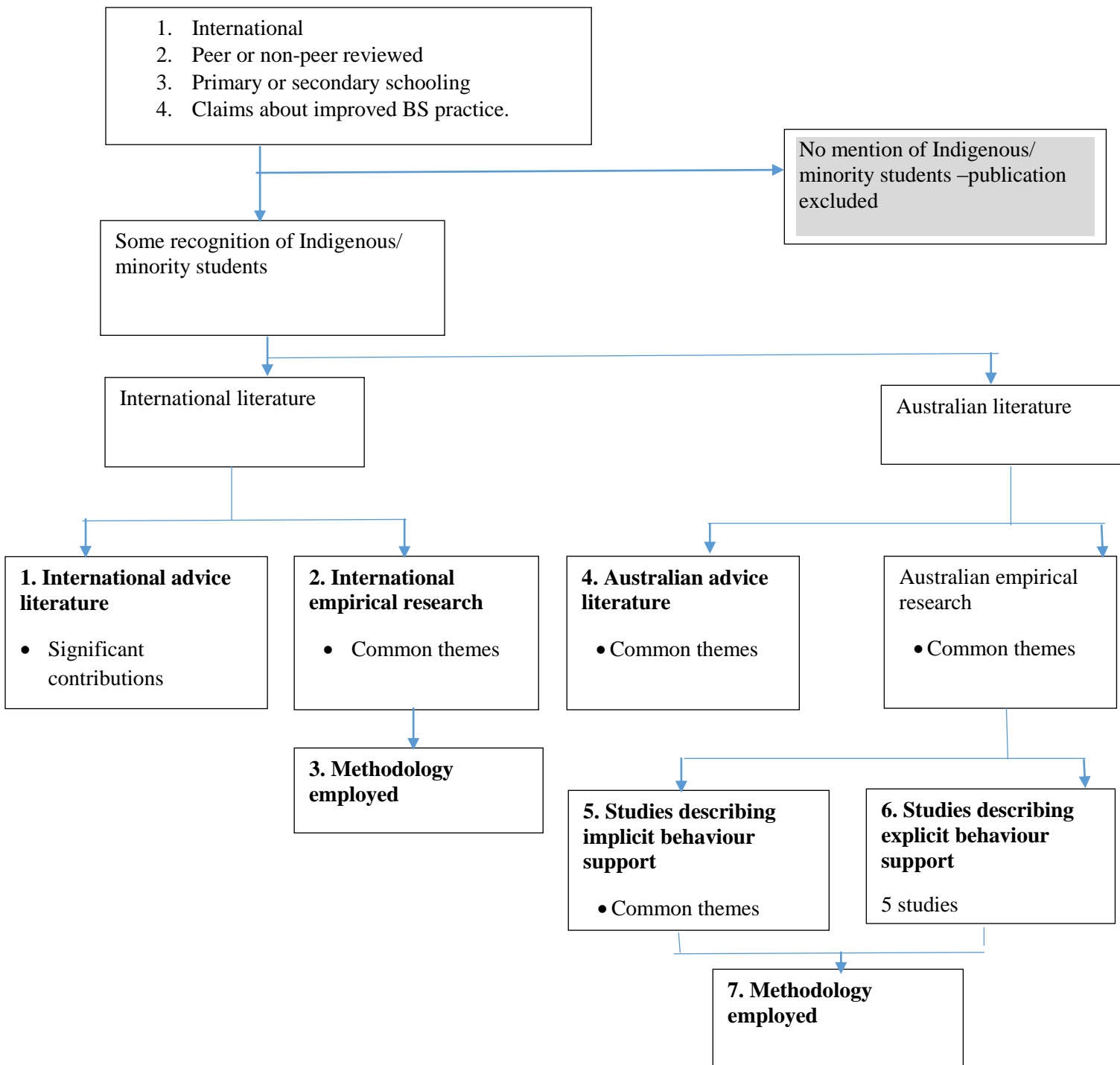
5 studies

7. Methodology employed

Figure 1. Process followed in the review of the literature

Findings

Emergent themes

An understanding of the Self and Other and power relations within the political context, without a deficit paradigm.

Teachers should know or be willing to learn: the culture and characteristics of students and the way they operate. It is the first factor identified by Weinstein et al in their 'Culturally Responsive Classroom Management' (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). There are five essential components of CRCM: recognition of one's own ethnocentrism; knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; an understanding of the broader social, economic and political context; an ability and willingness to use culturally responsive management strategies and a commitment to building caring classrooms (Weinstein et al., 2004). Successful teachers understood their own cultural background and similarities and differences from the cultures of the pupils. Problems can arise when teachers lack awareness of cultural differences (Milner, 2008; Milner & Tenore, 2010). Monroe calls this a "lack of cultural synchronisation" (Monroe, 2006; Monroe & Obidah, 2004). Some teachers explain race, culture and power in their discussion with students (Bliss, 2006; Milner, 2011; Ullicci, 2009). Research also covers the individual needs of particular students, for example, personal space (Milner, 2011), helping students have cultural pride (Milner, 2008) and helping with poverty and disorder (Schlosser, 1992).

Australian advice literature also emphasised teachers getting to know his or her own culture (Perso & Hayward, 2015). For decades advice literature suggested getting to know students and each student's cultural background and provided useful information about possible student qualities of which teachers should be aware (Bamblett, 1985; Berry & Hudson, 1997; Christie, 1980, 1985; Clarke, 2000; Gollan & Malin, 2012; Groome, 1995; Guider, 1991; Harris, 1987a, 1987b; Harrison, 2008, 2011; Hones, 2005; Howard, 1995; Ionn, 1995; Linkson, 1999; Ngarritjan-Kessaris, 1995; Osborne, 1996; Perso, Kenyon, & Darrough, 2012; Shaw, 2009; Sims, O'Connor, & Forrest, 2003; West, 1995). Failure to do so may result in unnecessary conflict as cultural differences may lead to misunderstanding (Bamblett, 1985; Clarke, 2000; Groome, 1995; Harris, 1987b; Harrison, 2008; Hones, 2005; Howard, 1995; Ionn, 1995; Perso, 2012). For example, Christie (1985) described a meaningful insight into a fundamental difference between western (Balanda) and Yolgnu cultures. The difference between 'purposeful' for Balanda and 'meaningful' for Yolgnu may help teachers understand student behaviour.

Empirical Australian research Malin (1990a) conducted in Aboriginal and non-Indigenous homes and schools detailed cultural differences and how teacher misunderstanding impacted on children. Malin's study also advised teachers to become aware of their own cultural orientations and identify their ideology (Malin, 1990a). Other Australian researchers also advocated knowing students (Hughes, More, & Williams, 2004; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Differences between the cultures of teachers and Indigenous students may include Aboriginal children's autonomy and equal status with adults (Hudsmith, 1992; Hughes et al., 2004; Malin, 1990a, 1990b; Partington et al., 2001); questioning (Hudsmith, 1992; Hughes et al., 2004; Simpson & Clancy, 2012); eye contact (Hughes et al., 2004; Malin, 1990a) and silence (Hughes et al., 2004). Aboriginal students may not be expected to be quiet, still and attentive to be listening (Hudsmith, 1992; Thwaite, 2007) and they may have different pathways through school (Nelson & Hay, 2010). Some support for these assertions came from Hudsmith (1992) who observed two teachers who used student cultural patterns and strengths to create supportive classrooms and meaningful learning experiences. While Australian research recommends these teacher understandings and strategies, these have not yet been empirically evaluated in classrooms for efficacy.

Personal qualities of the teacher

The first of these was that the teacher should be a warm demander. This theme figured prominently in international research. The term, used by Klienfeld (1975), is a "teacher stance that communicates both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect" (Bondy & Ross, 2008, p. 54). Monroe and Obidah (2004) described an African American teacher who used soft cultural behaviours; patterns of cultural humour and demonstrations of emotion and affect as well as a tough and no-nonsense style. Other literature describes a sense of humour with boundaries (Ullicci, 2009), care and assertiveness (Brown, 2003), warmth and demandingness (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010) and banter-filled dialogues as well as firm comments and lectures (Milner, 2008). Australian advice literature also endorses Kleinfeld's (1975) description of a warm demander, (Fanshawe, 1976, 1999; Guider, 1991; Osborne, 1996). Berry and Hudson (1997) recommended that teachers show something of themselves; expressions of caring by the teacher, no matter how small, are noticed (Hughes et al., 2004). Successful teachers show warmth rather than professional distance (Fanshawe, 1989). Hudsmith (1992) described how two teachers extended the boundaries of their roles. They shared aspects of themselves with humour, took students on excursions to their houses and communicated the message that students can and must succeed at school.

International advice literature also calls for the teacher to be a reflective practitioner (Pinto, 2013). This was also recommended in international research (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010). Australian advice literature emphasises an interactionist teaching style, to consider the effect of their behaviour on others (Guider, 1991; Perso, 2012). Teachers should have control of their own behaviour and emotions, (Pinto, 2013) an assertion empirically supported (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Kennedy, 2011; Sutton, Maudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). Teachers should understand that behaviour is specific to context (Glynn & Berryman, 2005; Pinto, 2013), that appropriate behaviour is culturally defined (Monroe & Obidah, 2004), that students may be learning a new behaviour (Glynn & Berryman, 2005; Monroe, 2009) and to look behind the behaviour for the need that is being expressed (Kennedy, 2011; Milner, 2011).

Australian research also supported some of these teacher characteristics (Partington, 2001). Adding that successful teachers of Aboriginal students are willing to learn from the children in the class (Simpson & Clancy, 2012) and they have an interest in the wider lives of the children (Bond, 2010). Hudspith (1995) found that successful teachers employ humour with Indigenous children by directing deprecating humour at themselves and not at children. They also explain jokes and avoid sarcasm, and direct humour to the whole class, not at individual students. These suggestions from Australian research have been observed and recorded in classrooms, but not empirically evaluated.

An ability to create effective relationships with Indigenous students

Australian and international authors agree that a teacher builds relationships with Indigenous students when they tell students a little about themselves (Berry & Hudson, 1997; Byrne & Munns, 2012; Kennedy, 2011; Milner, 2008, 2011; Schlosser, 1992; Sheets & Gay, 1996). The quality of the relationship is important to retention and achievement (Harrison, 2008; Howard, 1995) and counts as much as the quality of the teaching (Harrison, 2011). Students may be motivated by affection and relationship for their teacher (Bamblett, 1985; Harrison, 2008, 2011) and their responsibilities to community, rather than by the work itself, or respect for authority (Bamblett, 1985; Groome, 1995; Harrison, 2008, 2011; Howard, 1995; Nichol & Robinson, 2010; Perso, 2012). Teachers may need to establish a relationship of respect and trust before being able to succeed in getting students to work (Christie, 1987; Howard, 1995; Linkson, 1999) and that respect may need to be earned, not based on rank (Bamblett, 1985; Christie, 1987) or work ethic (Linkson, 1999). Students may be resentful of a teacher who is "demanding, overbearing and continually seeks compliance" (Harrison, 2008, p. 105). Australian research studies also endorsed relationship (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Hudsmith, 1992; Hudspith, 1995). Munns, O'Rourke and Bodkin-Andrews (2013) claimed relationships were a priority in schools that were successful with Indigenous students. Australian literature on this theme (Bond, 2010; Fanshawe, 1989; Hudsmith, 1992; Hudspith, 1995; Malin, 1990b; Munns et al., 2013; Thwaite, 2007; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009) recommended strategies to create relationships but

they have not been empirically evaluated in classrooms.

Successful pedagogy

Valuing Indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies engages Indigenous students (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005), while formal Western schooling often does not meet the educational needs of traditional societies (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Using student learning strengths to implement learning strategies prevents inappropriate behaviour and contributes to more settled classrooms. Culturally responsive pedagogy is currently being examined (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015; Lewthwaite, Boon, Webber, & Laffin, 2016; Lewthwaite et al., 2015). Due to its close link with behaviour, pedagogy is briefly mentioned in this review. International research documented that improved cooperation was seen when teachers increase wait time after asking questions or making requests (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Winterton, 1977), provide opportunities for group work (Hammond, Dupoux, & Ingalls, 2004; McCarthy & Benally, 2003), scaffold learning (Bondy & Ross, 2008), provide opportunities for movement (Boykin, 2001; Monroe, 2006), provide flexibility (Monroe, 2006), use storytelling (Milner, 2008) and implement activity based learning (McCarthy & Benally, 2003). Australian authors suggest that students may not have value in work for work's sake, so their tasks need to be enjoyable and have value in the context of their lives (Christie, 1987; Osborne, 1996). An Australian empirical study (Hudsmith, 1992) detailed how two teachers used student learning strengths in the classroom, allowing autonomy and leadership skills. These teachers achieved "[c]lassrooms where Adult/ pupil teacher interactions are characterized by sensitivity, respect and allegiance to common goals … [by] catering for Aboriginal student differences and needs, while focusing student creativity and energy towards self-enhancing goals" (Hudsmith, 1992, p. 11). Yunkaporta and McGinty's (2009) study focussed on this directly and found that student behaviour and engagement were better when staff worked in Indigenous ways; which they refined into six quality teaching pedagogies in common with Aboriginal epistemologies: self-direction; self-regulation; social support; connectedness to the world; narrative and cultural knowledge. Other suggestions included detailed scaffolding, to encourage student participation, even in direct questioning (Thwaite, 2007). These Australian studies have observed strategies that include particular pedagogies, but they have not empirically measured the impact on student learning.

Proactive behaviour support strategies

Time spent on proactive behaviour support strategies decreases disruption (Sanford & Evertson, 2006) and often proactive strategies are enmeshed in pedagogy discussions. Proactive strategies that were evident in the international research literature included making behaviour expectations clear (Anderson, Evertson, & Emmer, 1980; Bondy & Ross, 2008; Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Kennedy, 2011; Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; McCarthy & Benally, 2003) and teaching students how to meet expectations (Anderson et al., 1980).

Australian advice literature was grouped into two categories. One relates to making changes to the environment. For example, providing health services (Dockett, Mason, & Perry, 2006); making sure students' needs for belonging and attention are met (Harrison, 2011); valuing Indigenous cultures (Bamblett, 1985); increasing teacher tolerance of movement, noise and flexibility (Nichol & Robinson, 2010); avoiding topics that have the potential to create disharmony (Harrison, 2008); including Aboriginal role models (Dockett et al., 2006; Hones, 2005); and helping students to transition to secondary school, particularly in a boarding school (Perso et al., 2012). The other category involves examining expectations. For instance, providing explicit behaviour expectations and pedagogy (Harrison, 2011; Sarra, 2011b), allowing student input to goals and teaching the purpose of western schooling (West, 1995), because it is not possible to create "a list of rules for classroom behaviour and expect Indigenous students to automatically comply with them (like their families were compelled to do in the past)" (Harrison, 2008, p. 101). Australian research specifically mentioned that teachers should avoid spotlighting students (Malin, 1990b; Thwaite, 2007) and provide social support as the key pedagogy to develop self-direction (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Teachers should learn how to frame requests in a way that will engage students (Simpson & Clancy, 2012) and use fewer worksheets (Partington et al., 2001). Keddie (2013) described proactive

approaches at a whole-school level. Once again these proactive strategies suggested in Australian literature were not measured for their impact on student learning.

Teachers should use culturally aware reactive behaviour support and management strategies

That teachers should not make every infraction a serious offense (Ullicci, 2009), but calmly deliver consequences (Bondy et al., 2007) as noted by international authors. Moreover, reactive interventions that help students with behaviour problems should be chosen and implemented in a way that suits the cultures of the students (Baydala et al., 2009; Bazron, Osher, & Fleischman, 2005; Hammond et al., 2004; Monroe, 2006; Sheets & Gay, 1996; Weinstein et al., 2003; Weinstein et al., 2004). Successful teachers looked for reasons behind the behaviour and found ways to meet student needs (Kennedy, 2011). They were consistent (Milner, 2008), ensured they did not take student behaviour personally (Kennedy, 2011), and refrained from holding grudges (Milner, 2008). Policies of zero tolerance did not work to change student behaviour (Noguera, 2003; Nolan, 2007). Nolan's findings were supported by mainstream literature (Jeffers, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 1999a; Peterson, 1999b). Too often schools failed to address the reasons for behaviour and used suspension to address behaviour concerns and this was seen to lead to the overrepresentation of marginalised and Indigenous students in negative indicator statistics (Sheets & Gay, 1996; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

Australian authors maintained that reactive strategies need to be culturally appropriate (Christie, 1987; Guider, 1991; Harrison, 2008). "Aunties" and "Uncles" may sometimes discipline children rather than parents (Michie, 2014). Christie (1987) recommended rewarding acceptable behaviour with consistent and short-lived rewards to shape behaviour rather than punishing hard. Individual praise can cause the opposite effect (Christie, 1987) so shared group rewards or individual praise in private were suggested (Harrison, 2008). Christie (1987) warns that the time to teach 'Balanda' values is not in the middle of a conflict. Following conflict, punitive measures may not be productive (Groome, 1995). Students could be asked to consider the importance of their responsibility to community (Harrison, 2008). Teachers may lose credibility if they use excessive authority, shouting, sarcasm or being bossy (Harrison, 2011; Howard, 1995). Harrison (2008) also warned that threats, punishments and use of authority won't work. Students may even leave the school (Gray & Partington, 2003). Christie (1987) suggested that the best way to earn respect is to maintain a positive attitude, focussing on cooperation and "defusing potentially explosive situations quickly and quietly" (Christie, 1987, p. 119) and being 'fair' as students see it (Harrison, 2008; Nichol & Robinson, 2010). Also, catch students showing appropriate behaviour (Harrison, 2011); sort out as much as possible in the classroom, only take the serious things to the office (Christie, 1987) and be aware that students may want to escape school, so look for alternatives to suspension (Harrison, 2008). However, Australian empirical research on this theme is minimal and lacking in empirical evaluation of efficacy. Studies that mentioned behaviour support and management implicitly did not cover reactive strategies. Partington (2001), suggested an examination of motivations, contexts and interactions, dealing with each incident separately from previous incidents; defusing strategies; not simply blaming students; and employing a restrained use of power. Procedures should be set, but with flexibility (Partington et al., 2001).

Teachers should create links with community

This theme was prominent in the international literature (Michie, 2014; Pinto, 2013; Weinstein et al., 2004). International research suggested that teachers and families may have different standards and expectations about what is appropriate behaviour in schools. For example, a Mexican father did not want his son playing in the kindergarten domestic science area while a Pakistani family did not want their daughter sitting next to a boy (Cary, 2000). In her study, Monroe (2009) found that effective teachers used family connections as a resource. For instance in two rural Indian reservations Hammond (2004) found that the typical micro-managing classroom management style did not fit with cultural values of self-management for group benefit. They made attempts to reach out to families and

support them. Sometimes racial difference between families and teachers hindered these relationships, but that did not stop teachers trying.

Many Australian authors recommended involving community members and forming friendships with parents and carers (Bamblett, 1985; Budby, 1994; Clarke, 2000; Dockett et al., 2006; Guider, 1991; Milgate & Giles-Brown, 2013; Osborne, 1996; Perso, 2012; Sims et al., 2003; Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin, 2015). To do this effectively, when talking with parents teachers could make a connection with them first, take the long way around in conversation, before bringing up issues about their child (Harrison 2008). In remote communities Rogers (1994) suggested listening to, and negotiating with, community on such issues as: hours of schooling, organisation of the school year and consideration of culture. Sims et al. (2003) suggested teachers create an environment where families feel comfortable or meet away from school, learn culturally appropriate communication styles and develop an understanding of grammar, syntax and differences in the meaning of words. Cultural awareness and listening to elders is important (Bond, 2004; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009) and could foster better attendance (Clarke, 2000). "It is vital that education be improved through a process of attentive listening rather than an imposition of inappropriate pedagogy, curriculum and lack of meaningful personal relationships with the community" (Colman-Dimon, 2000, p. 43). Again, the impact of suggested strategies were not evaluated in the classroom.

Methodologically, Australian and international research was largely qualitative, featuring interviews, observations and some examination of school documents. Quantitative research was rare and usually in the context of psychological assessments. Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy's (2007) study was the best example of a triangulated mixed methods approach located in this literature. They found that Western traditional means of communication manifested behaviour problems and disruptions. An Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) was created, guided by the experiences of Maori students, families, their teachers and Principals. Essential to this ETP, was a rejection of deficit paradigms about differences, a commitment to reflective practice and acceptance of responsibility for the learning of their students. The research empirically measured the impact of the ETP in mainstream secondary classrooms. Quantitative results were presented which were supported by analysis of qualitative data from student and teacher interviews. The findings showed increased numeracy and literacy for all Maori students, with a clear relationship between implementation of the ETP and Maori student performance. To date, this kind of empirical evaluation of strategies suggested by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and teachers has not been conducted in Australia.

Conclusions

In Australia, little systematic and empirically-based research provided any evidence of what works in influencing Indigenous students' learning (Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Price & Hughes, 2009) and classroom learning environments, specifically in regards to behaviour support. The Australian literature is replete with strategies to support Indigenous student behaviour, but lacks empirical evidence. We identified only five studies based on the topic directly, and of these, three suggested strategies, but evidence of reactive strategies was particularly poor. There is a clear gap in Australian empirical studies that examine effective classrooms management strategies for Indigenous students which could be used to inform teacher practice. This gap in the literature must be addressed in order to establish valid ways to successfully support Indigenous students in Australian schools, to help staunch their suspension and exclusion rates, increase their academic outcomes and wellbeing and to provide professional development for current and future teachers.

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