

Lesson to learn, discourses to change: Conversations with Principals

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This presentation focuses on interviews with n=5 Principals across five NSW secondary schools to talk about the power, influence, and necessity of school leadership in facilitating a culture of success for positive student outcomes. From an analysis of interviews conducted through the lens of Moodie's (2018) Decolonising Race Theory framework, three key themes emerged: a) leading culture, identity and school-community relationships, b) leading curriculum, pedagogy and teacher development, and c) leading student participation and achievement. While there was acknowledgement and genuine efforts made to incorporate cultural programs that support Aboriginal identity and build confidence in mainstream schooling, deficit and assimilatory discourses were still evident. This was particularly the case where Principals seemed to view culture as a potential impediment to academic success and in relegating the responsibility of poor achievement with families and communities. The provocation put forward in this presentation is that the pervasive undermining presence of neoliberal policies and practices constrain Principals in a cycle of measurable, comparable outcomes, continue to render Aboriginal students as deficit despite everyone's best efforts. Ultimately, the presentation interrogates the notion that from the context of neoliberal policies, Aboriginal students and their families continued to be positioned as deficit, and consequently, problems to be fixed. All the while, settler-colonial peoples and practices are freed from self-reflective and culturally-responsive actions.