

Participation of Indigenous students in education: an exploration of the significance of place in an Indigenous community school

Parmesh Mudhan

B.A. (Hons), Grad.Dip.Ed., M.A.

This dissertation is the report of an investigation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University.

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I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

Abstract

This study explores the pedagogical significance of life experiences of Indigenous students from an Australian community school and its relation to school participation. In particular the study focuses on the implications of students' associations with 'place' on school curriculum. With the rate of participation of Indigenous students in education currently lower compared with non-Indigenous students, this study further informs our understanding of this phenomenon.

The study is interpretive, based on the perspectives of students, staff and parents of an Indigenous community school successful in improving participation of Indigenous students to Year 10, and informed by the researcher's own lived experiences teaching Indigenous students in three different countries. During this time, it was observed that Indigenous students' association with place was a significant factor in their participation in education.

Gruenewald's multidimensional framework for place-conscious education is employed to guide the analysis and interpretation of data as it provides a means of addressing two important issues revealed in the review of literature on participation. First, participation is examined and interpreted in different ways, and second, a common thread in the differing interpretations is the concept of place. Analyses of the data reveal two overarching dimensions: Place and Aboriginality. Further analysis, informed by notions of place-conscious education reveal five identifiable elements for

enhancing participation of Indigenous students in education: Curriculum Method, Curriculum Content, Careers, Partners and Identity. Educational programs that recognise how these elements are related to place and action them are likely to be more effective in enhancing participation of Indigenous students in education.

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