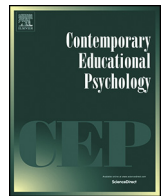




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Contemporary Educational Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/cedpsych

Cultural perspectives on Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian students' school motivation and engagement

Janet Mooney, Marjorie Seaton, Gurvinder Kaur, Herbert W. Marsh,
Alexander Seeshing Yeung *

Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University, 25A Barker Road, Strathfield, NSW 2135, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online

Keywords:
Aboriginal
Cultural perspectives
School self-concept
Mastery goals
Performance goals

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper was to investigate (a) similarities and differences in cultural perspectives, self-concept, and school motivation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian students; and (b) the relative influences of self-concept, motivation, and cultural perspectives on academic engagement. Data were collected from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Years 3 to 6 from 52 primary schools in metropolitan Sydney ($N = 1745$). Students completed a questionnaire asking about three cultural perspective factors (Aboriginal perspective, cultural diversity, and cultural identity), school self-concept, two motivation factors (a mastery approach goal and a performance approach goal), and a behavioral outcome (academic engagement). Results indicated that Aboriginal students were higher in all three cultural perspectives, but did not differ much from non-Aboriginal students in school self-concept, motivation, and academic engagement. For both groups cultural diversity, cultural identity, school self-concept, and a mastery approach goal orientation were positive predictors of academic engagement. A performance approach goal orientation was not a significant predictor of engagement but higher SES and being female were positive predictors. The findings suggest that teachers should understand the importance of promoting a positive sense of culture in the classroom to better engage students.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Student engagement has been a serious issue for Aboriginal Australian students (Sarra, 2011). The complexity of this issue is related partly to the values and beliefs Aboriginal students hold as being Aboriginal, together with cultural diversity and cultural identity held by all Australians in a multicultural and multilingual context. It may also be related to self-concept and motivational factors that have been shown to influence Aboriginal students' academic work (Arens, Bodkin-Andrews, Craven, & Yeung, 2014). In the present study, we focused on self-concept and motivational factors (mastery and performance approach goal orientations) that are known to predict outcomes such as engagement. We also examined three cultural perspective factors—Aboriginal perspective (a culture-specific perspective), and cultural diversity and cultural identity (more diverse perspectives)—which are deemed to enable Aboriginal children to function well.

Bandura (2011) emphasizes, in his social cognitive theory, three major determinants of human functioning: personal, environmen-

tal, and behavioral. In influencing academic functioning, among a wide range of constructs, self-concept has been known to be a strong predictor of achievement (Marsh & Craven, 2006; Yeung, 2011), and achievement goals (mastery approach and performance approach goals) have been known to influence learning and engagement for students in different cultures (McInerney, Yeung, & McInerney, 2001). Hence self-concept and motivation together are major personal determinants of functioning in an academic context. Engagement, as a behavioral determinant, is also known to influence academic outcomes (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008). However, cultural perspectives, as an environmental determinant of functioning, have been mostly neglected, especially in Aboriginal education. The present study attempts to contribute to an understanding of this missing piece in the literature with the hope of identifying a significant focus to address Indigenous disadvantages.

1.1. Cultural perspectives

When examining the cultural perspectives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, all Australian governments in the last two decades have acknowledged that Aboriginal Australians are the most disadvantaged group of Australians across all socio-economic indicators (Australian Government, 2015). In fact, Biddle and Taylor

* Corresponding author. Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University, Locked Bag 2002, Strathfield, NSW 2135, Australia. Fax: +61 (2) 9701 4201.

E-mail address: alexander.yeung@acu.edu.au (A.S. Yeung).

(2012) have shown that Aboriginal Australians are one of the most disadvantaged Indigenous populations in the world.

The ongoing legacy of colonization and governmental policies has led to slow progress of Aboriginal people on every social indicator—health, education, housing, imprisonment, life expectancy (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012–2013; Australian Government, 2015; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Social Justice Report, 2004; Mooney, 2005; National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). In terms of educational provision, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013) shows that Australia has fewer underperforming students than the OECD average and a high proportion of children enrolled in early childhood education and comprehensive school until age 16. However, rural and Aboriginal student populations have lower academic performance and less access to tertiary education than the national average. As health, employment and housing outcomes are associated with educational outcomes for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, it is important to find ways to promote success in education.

For Aboriginal students, Schwab (2001) defines success as what happens in the school, the interaction of Aboriginal staff, the executive vision and leadership, committed and creative teachers, recognition and celebration of the individual, empowerment, and community engagement. Munns, O'Rourke, and Bodkin-Andrews (2013) undertook research on what seeded success for Aboriginal students in schools. They concluded that in schools where Aboriginal students were achieving successful academic outcomes, Aboriginal perspectives had been embedded across the curriculum; there was targeted support for Aboriginal students and a strong relationship between the school and the Aboriginal community. In a nutshell, education that is inclusive and respects the students' identity and culture is seen as a key factor in developing the ability of Aboriginal students to move between cultures and gain skills necessary to live in a global world (Price, 2012; Sarra, 2011). As noted in the National Aboriginal and Torres Islander Health Plan (2013–2023) (Australian Government, 2013) initiatives that facilitate a strong sense of identity and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can play a role in developing positive health and wellbeing.

1.1.1. Historical complexities

To understand the perspectives taken by Aboriginal children in education, we need to understand the complexity of Aboriginal history. Historically in Australia, there are two distinct Indigenous cultures. Aboriginal people inhabited the main island of Australia; Torres Strait Island people lived on the islands of the Torres Strait, which separates the Australian mainland at Cape York from Papua New Guinea. The Indigenous people of the Torres Strait are a distinct people with their own culture and identity and although they have had long-standing contact with the Aboriginal Australians in the south, they are of Melanesian descent (Purdie, Milgate, & Bell, 2011). Prior to colonization, neither the Aboriginal peoples of the Mainland nor the Torres Strait Islanders of the northern islands believed that they were of one nation. In the present study, the term "Indigenous" is inclusive of these first peoples (Craven, Dillon, & Parbury, 2013), although the sample here was Aboriginal.

The invasion and colonization of Australia devastated Aboriginal people and their culture and, whether intentionally or not, resulted in the devaluing of Aboriginal people and the emergence of two separate histories. Colonization and imperialism justified the imperial nation's vanquishing other lands with ideologies which supported those acquisitions. As Eckerman et al. (2007) noted, "Prevailing attitudes and scientific and intellectual beliefs in Europe at the time set the tone for dealing with Indigenous inhabitants" (p. 27), and these "attitudes and scientific and intellectual beliefs" continued

to pervade the mindsets of many non-Aboriginal Australians. As a consequence, a dominant history emerged in Australia from the perspective of the colonizers—that of settler pioneers conquering a brave new world in the face of hardship. The settlers' rationale for taking the lands was on the basis that they were unused or empty, but this premise of terra nullius dehumanized Aboriginal people and relegated them to the status of flora and fauna (Eckerman et al., 2007; Phillips & Lampert, 2005). Aboriginal history, the other history of guerrilla warfare, retaliatory raids, massacres, genocide, dispossession, confinement of people to missions and reserves, and the Stolen Generations, were censored as 'black history' and largely ignored (Attwood, 2005; Eckerman et al., 2007; Lippman, 1981; McConnochie, 1973; Moses, 2004; Reynolds, 1999; Rowley, 1981). The impact of colonization on the psyche of many Australians cannot be underestimated. As Said (1993) recognized, although colonialism has ended, "imperialism... lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (p. 8). For many non-Aboriginal people, there is a collective amnesia of the events of the past, which have shaped this nation.

In 1991, the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody emphasized the importance of history, education and self-determination as the basis for addressing social injustice in Australia. Commissioner Johnston (1991) noted in relation to history, policy and the Australian psyche that "for a complexity of reasons the non-Aboriginal population has, in the mass, been nurtured on active and passive ideas of racial superiority in relation to Aboriginal people and which sit well with the policies of the domination and control that have been applied" (p. 10). In terms of schooling, Sarra (2011) points out that:

Given the discrepancy between white perceptions of being Aboriginal and the Aboriginal perceptions of being Aboriginal, institutions, such as schools, become inherently vexed and problematic since they are a major aspect of the contact zone where these perceptions meet. (p. 102)

The complexity of the different cultural values and beliefs between Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal students and staff in the school needs clarification and mutual understanding. If Aboriginal children's cultural perspectives are not valued within the school environment, the complexities of difference can result in poor intercultural relationships, which often result in poor attendance by Aboriginal students and a failure to engage (Sarra, 2011).

In the present study, we focused on three cultural perspective factors: Aboriginal perspective (a culture-specific perspective), and cultural diversity and cultural identity (more diverse perspectives). These factors are interrelated but they serve different functions in the development of Aboriginal children. They are elaborated below:

1.1.2. Aboriginal perspective

Effectively teaching Aboriginal Studies and promoting Aboriginal perspectives to all students as well as teaching Aboriginal students about Aboriginal Australia have been a major goal of Australia's National Aboriginal Policy for the past three decades (Commonwealth of Australia, 1986, 1988, 1989). Teachers' teaching their pupils about Aboriginal people, their history, culture and values is believed to have many positive outcomes such as creating an understanding for non-Aboriginal people of the practices and principles of attitudinal change that can produce a more cohesive community of Australians. For Aboriginal students, the goal of recognizing their identity and respecting their diverse learning needs is anticipated to result in enhancing self-esteem, and facilitating a more positive self-concept (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; also see Craven, 1999a, 1999b; Keech, 2010; Phillips & Lampert, 2005; Sarra, 2011). Hence, positive learning outcomes can be achieved for Aboriginal

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4937937>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4937937>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)