



Cultural Practices and Learning

Dr Greg Noble from the Centre for Cultural Research and Dr Megan Watkins from the School of Education are undertaking an Australian Research Council Linkage project, in collaboration with the Multicultural Education Unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training, to explore how particular home and school practices help produce the attributes of learners.



In particular, they will examine the links between ethnicity, socio-cultural background and what they call the “scholarly habitus” that is, the dispositions and capacities necessary for successful participation in the Australian education system.

Dr Noble explained that: ‘Students from Asian backgrounds are often perceived as having a cultural disposition or learning style that equips them for academic success, particularly in areas such as mathematics. Others, such as Pacific Islander students are perceived as culturally prone to educational under-achievement. While there is some evidence for these patterns and dispositions in terms of ethnic background, it is not clear how these are related.’

The study will consider whether ethnicity alone is the key or whether a complex set of socio-cultural factors related to family background, gender and socio-economic status are also contributing factors. The research will explore teaching and learning practices both at school and in the home in six schools across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and socio-economic groups within the Sydney metropolitan area. By studying the link between home and school, it is hoped effective educational practices will be enhanced.

‘We suspect that the emphasis has unduly fallen on ethnic background when it should be on the home and school *practices* which produce these capacities’, Dr Noble said.

Dr Watkins pointed out that, ‘The data from our project will greatly enhance our knowledge of the quality of the learning environment and the ways quality teaching can be adjusted in contemporary classrooms to improve student outcomes for all students of diverse backgrounds.’

Funding has been set at: \$324,000.

Project Title: *Cultural Diversity and Learning.*

Research Partner: *Multicultural Education Unit, NSW Department of Education and Training*

Website:

<http://www.uws.edu.au/research/researchcentres/ccr>

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