



FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKERS

Position Paper

Imagine...

Imagine all Australian students engaging with the detailed narratives surrounding the Frontier Wars, the series of conflicts between Australia's First Peoples and European settlers during the colonial era, offering a wealth of opportunity for students to investigate contested truths and construct arguments from multiple perspectives. By examining primary sources, oral histories, and diverse accounts, students can develop critical analysis skills while grappling with the complexities of this often-overlooked chapter in Australian history.

Our Position

Ngarrngga recognises the profound value that the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples hold for Australian society. Learning about Indigenous knowledges offers students the opportunity to practice skills in critical thinking and ethical reasoning; essential for engaging with the intricacies of our dynamic global landscape and as future Australian democratic citizens. While the practice of critical thinking transcends disciplines and can be cultivated through various forms of information and knowledge, it is particularly vital in the context of learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories, and cultures due to historical and ongoing misrepresentation and marginalisation that has pervaded within this space.

Is There Space for Indigenous Content in a Crowded Curriculum?

Critics argue that incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures poses significant challenges to an already overburdened educational system. And, that it would further crowd an already packed curriculum, potentially detracting from other essential areas of learning and Western traditions that some view as foundational. There is a concern that this cross-curricular priority is perceived as an additional burden rather than an integrated part of the curriculum, with some educators acknowledging the need for more resources and expertise-building. Instead, many critics argue for a more focused educational approach that prioritises what they consider core subjects, which they believe would better address declining educational standards and prepare students for a competitive global economy.

Building Fundamental Democratic Skills

The importance of critical thinking and literacy cannot be overstated in an era where information and misinformation proliferate at an unprecedented rate, amplified by the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence technologies. Australian students must be actively engaging in shaping their future, equipped with the skills to evaluate, discern, and debate multiple perspectives, ideas, and beliefs. Thinking critically helps us to filter information, scrutinise policies, and participate meaningfully in democratic discussions. By promoting these vital skills, an education that is inclusive of Indigenous perspectives and cultures equips learners with indispensable tools for democratic engagement and holding institutions accountable.

Shaping a Comprehensive and Balanced Education

A truly pluralistic society demands a citizenry capable of considering diverse viewpoints, deconstructing biases, and applying moral reasoning to complex issues. The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in education provides invaluable opportunities for students to engage with diverse views and versions of Australia's collective history. Being specific with our learners as to why we use these materials is crucial, so that we can learn more about the application of critical thinking skills, and in doing so, learn about the world and conditions around us from diverse worldviews, including Indigenous or First Nations' perspectives. The future generation of Australians must be given a full, comprehensive and balanced context of their nation's histories and cultures. Interacting with the entirety of the nuances of society is integral for students to practice and refine their critical thinking abilities.

Calls to Action

We challenge **educators, educational leaders, and educational institutions**, from early childhood centres to universities, to critically examine their curricula, teaching practices, and institutional cultures to identify and address any biases, stereotypes, or marginalisation of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges, as well as identify opportunities to strengthen this work.

We urge the **Australian government and education authorities** to provide adequate funding and resources to support initiatives, which aim to amplify Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in education.

Resourcing Challenges Faced by Educators

"...time and time again, [searching] comes up with all Aboriginal people are the same, and Torres Strait Islanders often don't get a look-in... there's a lot of nuances that are little complications to do things well and effectively without causing offence."

– Practicing teacher,
Ngarrngga research

We call upon **governments and educational policymakers** to prioritise the meaningful integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledges into the national curriculum across all subject areas and grade levels.

We encourage **all Australians**, regardless of their background, to engage with and learn about the histories, cultures, and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This can be achieved through attending cultural events, reading works by Indigenous authors, and seeking out opportunities for respectful dialogue and knowledge-sharing.