



RETHINKING RELIANCE ON COMMUNITIES

Position Paper

Imagine...

Imagine a vibrant education system where educators are empowered and supported to authentically incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across all subjects. With sustainable policies, dedicated funding, professional development, and resources, teachers can confidently integrate Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing into their curriculum. Supported by robust professional networks, leadership positions, and a culture of continuous learning, educators navigate this integration with confidence and critical reflection. They have access to contemporary examples showcasing the convergence of Indigenous and Western approaches, conveying the deep interconnection between land, culture, and Indigenous knowledges. This comprehensive approach equips teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to honour Indigenous perspectives, enriching the learning experiences of all students.

Our Position

To truly embrace the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in education, we must empower educators to take ownership of their own professional growth and cultural competence. This requires a comprehensive, sustained approach that supports and equips teachers with the knowledge, skills, and resources to navigate this complex terrain with confidence, sensitivity, and a deep respect for Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing.

Respecting Relationality as Best Practice

Bridging the gap in knowledge and experience surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is a challenge that many educators have sought to address by establishing connections with local cultural and knowledge holders. This relational approach, inviting Indigenous experts to share their wisdom with teachers and students, is widely regarded as best practice for non-Indigenous teachers to engage meaningfully with these topics (Auld et al., 2016; Baynes, 2015; Burgess et al., 2022). While we recognise the critical importance of practicing relationality and advocate for the localisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, relying solely on this approach to address the scale of teachers requiring assistance, coupled with the time commitment necessary for deep critical thinking and inquiry in this space creates a challenge of great magnitude.

Taking Responsibility to Address the Colonial Load

Moreover, issues have been highlighted regarding the substantial cultural labour and associated burdens placed upon Indigenous community educators and Indigenous teachers engaged in this work (Hogarth, 2019; Ma Rhea et al., 2012). This concept, termed colonial load or cultural taxation, refers to the additional responsibilities and unpaid work frequently requested or expected of Indigenous peoples to provide cultural education and guidance to their non-Indigenous counterparts. This imbalance can contribute to overwork, burnout, and inequitable workload distributions for those shouldering these extra cultural obligations. Placing excessive reliance on cultural and knowledge holders as resources has the potential of perpetuating an exploitative and extractive relationship, reminiscent of the dynamics of colonialism. It also deflects responsibility from non-Indigenous teachers in engaging in their own capacity-building to effectively teach this content.

Is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content overrepresented and overemphasised?

Recently, the national curriculum came under scrutiny for allegedly offering too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures-related content elaborations for teachers, with the claim that they make up 75 percent of the total suggestions for how to weave the three cross-curricular priorities into the curriculum (Hannaford, 2025). However, this critique reveals a crucial misunderstanding: content elaborations are not the 'curriculum' but rather serve as supportive resources, offering examples of how aspects of the curriculum can be enacted and taught in classrooms. This distinction is critical as there are significant factors that affect levels of teacher confidence in teaching this content. To suggest that these supportive resources are an overrepresentation is to fundamentally misunderstand the challenges at hand. The reality is, teachers require comprehensive support, guidance, and resources to confidently and respectfully incorporate Indigenous content into their classrooms.

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.

What Teachers Want in Resources

"More locally produced. If I knew it was ok for me to use them. Put together by community members and appropriate cultural references."

– 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.

References

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