



ENCOURAGING EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION

Position Paper

Imagine...

Envision a classroom that blends mathematical concepts with Indigenous knowledge, using bushfires and wind behaviour as a focal point. Students apply complex mathematical models to predict fire spread, while learning about traditional fire management practices. They calculate wind and terrain effects on fire propagation using geometry and rate equations, simultaneously developing an appreciation for the ecological balance maintained through localised Indigenous practices. These contexts enhance their mathematical skills while fostering cultural understanding and environmental awareness, demonstrating the relevance of Indigenous knowledge in addressing broader modern challenges like climate change and biodiversity conservation.

Our Position

The Productivity Commission (2024) emphasises the importance of adopting a culturally responsive pedagogy to support Indigenous students to reach their full educational potential. By intentionally developing positive motivational and engagement factors through the amplification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, educators can empower Indigenous students to thrive academically while reinforcing their intrinsic drive and commitment to learning. The implications are far-reaching, as positive motivation and engagement not only contribute to immediate academic gains but also lay the foundation for long-term educational success and personal growth.

Will It Take Time Away from More 'Important' Learning?

Some critics argue that incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into education diverts resources and time away from 'core' or more 'important' learning, a view stemming from a narrow perspective that undervalues Indigenous knowledges. This is not to suggest that Indigenous learners do not require the development of literacy, numeracy, and other discipline-based knowledge and skills. Rather, these skills are enriched, deepened and contextualised by the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. It is widely accepted best practice for teachers to understand their students' diverse backgrounds and tailor their practices accordingly and engage their students in their learning. The challenge lies in equipping educators with the confidence to incorporate unfamiliar Indigenous content. Integrating Indigenous perspectives not only upholds the rights of Indigenous learners but also aligns with effective teaching methods creating an enriching environment that empowers learners while working to pedagogical best practices.

Improving Educational Outcomes

Research provides compelling evidence that fostering positive motivation and engagement is pivotal for Indigenous students, exerting a profound impact on critical educational outcomes. A study by Martin et al. (2021) revealed that positive motivation and engagement were powerful predictors of elevated aspirations, enhanced academic resilience (buoyancy), increased homework completion, and improved achievement among Indigenous students. These findings highlight the transformative potential of cultivating a strengths-based approach that nurtures Indigenous students' self-efficacy, mindset, value for education, planning and monitoring skills, persistence, and effective task management.

Incorporating Diverse Contexts for Engaged Learning

Engagement and motivation can be enhanced by offering Indigenous students a diverse array of contexts to learn from, both familiar and unfamiliar, through which they can forge meaningful and relevant connections with new learnings and content (Nakata, 2011). Employing differentiated teaching practices that cater to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all learners is pivotal in providing equitable educational opportunities. This approach to tailoring teaching is crucial to ensuring that students, regardless of their cultural contexts or lived realities, perceive their education as meaningful, applicable, and valuable.

Recognising and Embracing Diversity

"It highlights to me generally how diverse mob are and the importance of getting all these voices across to kids, from the city to the bush and from young and old across class, gender and sexuality too."

– Practicing teacher, Ngarrngga research

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.

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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- Productivity Commission. (2024). *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2024*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/closing-the-gapannual-data-compilation-july2024.pdf>