



SHAPING AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE

Position Paper

Imagine...

Imagine the profound impact of teaching students about the remarkable engineering feat of the Gunditjmara people, who constructed an advanced system of aquaculture and eel trapping channels in western Victoria, dating back over 6,600 years; one of the oldest aquaculture sites in the world. Or the awe-inspiring Murujuga in Western Australia, home to one of the densest collections of rock carvings in the world, with petroglyphs dating back at least 50,000 years, providing an extraordinary record of human thought and cultural practices.

Our Position

Ngarrngga recognises the profound value that the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples hold for Australian society. The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in Australian education is not merely a matter of preserving cultural heritage but a vital step towards creating a more inclusive, equitable, and harmonious society; one that celebrates the richness of perspectives that have shaped Australia's past, present, and future.

Shaping Active and Informed Citizens

The educational goals of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* state the need to ensure young Australians become active and informed citizens who understand and have learned about the depth and richness of their nation's heritage. It is through an ongoing process of an open exchange of ideas, the recognition of diverse perspectives not just in education but of the wider community, and the cultivation of skills in higher-order reasoning in an ever-changing society that we can build a stronger, more resilient democracy; one that embraces Australia's cultural diversity and empowers all citizens to participate fully in the democratic process.

Embracing Diverse National Heritage

Embracing and celebrating the world's oldest continuous living cultures can create a more inclusive, educated, and attuned society, where every Australian takes pride in the achievements and knowledge systems of First Peoples. It can encourage students, educators, and educational settings to engage more meaningfully with their local communities, promoting harmonious living and a shared celebration of Australia's diversity.

Is Prioritising Indigenous Knowledges a Threat to Democracy?

The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in Australian education has sometimes been sensationalised in the media as a threat to democracy. These critics argue that prioritising Indigenous knowledges is part of an ideological agenda aimed at weakening liberal democracy and fuelling social division. This perspective stems from a narrow understanding of what constitutes a robust democratic society and disregards the wealth of Indigenous experiences that have shaped Australia for millennia, employing media techniques



to polarise public opinions. Such viewpoints highlight the crucial importance of education and teachers in promoting truth-telling and developing critical literacy skills among the Australian population. Contrary to undermining democracy, engagement with diverse cultural perspectives, including Indigenous ones, is vital for developing a critically conscious citizenry capable of grappling with complexities and strive towards democracy's goal in representing all voices within the nation.

Far from being a threat, the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in education strengthens democracy by fostering empathy, critical thinking, and a more inclusive understanding of Australia's history and identity. When we acknowledge the 65,000 year continuum of Indigenous histories and cultures, we do not diminish the past 200 years. We gain a fuller, richer understanding of the land and peoples that shape the Australian identity.

A Shared Endeavour

"...we need to have a more collaborative approach... that's how deeper learning and embedment will come... First Nations knowledge always has to be meaningful and purposeful; it doesn't stand on its own."

– 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

Department of Education. (2019). The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. <https://www.education.gov.au/download/4816/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/7179/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/docx>