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Australian Institute  
for Teaching and  
School Leadership  
Limited

# Capability Framework

Building a culturally responsive  
Australian teaching workforce

September 2022

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, sea country and waterways from across Australia. We honour and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.



### About the artwork

Reko Rennie, *Untitled 2020*.

Reko Rennie is an interdisciplinary artist who explores his Aboriginal identity through contemporary media. Through his art, Rennie provokes discussion surrounding Indigenous culture and identity in contemporary urban environments. Largely autobiographical, his commanding works combine the iconography of his Kamilaroi heritage with stylistic elements of graffiti. He merges traditional diamond-shaped designs, hand-drawn symbols, and repetitive patterning to subvert romantic ideologies of Aboriginal identity.

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

The power of education to impact change cannot be overstated. For many, education is the means through which dreams and aspirations are realised. For others, education is something to be endured for little or no gain. The legacy of colonisation has undermined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' access to their cultures, identities, histories and languages, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have not had access to a complete, relevant, and responsive education.

Teachers and school leaders serve a vital role in our society; they act as mentors, experts and role models for future generations and have the power to impact the change that is required in our classrooms and learning environments to ensure that every student is accessing quality education.

Cultural responsiveness is not about adding to the demands of teachers; it is about enhancing and enriching teacher practice and broadening the perspective of the profession. It will strengthen the understanding and skills of teachers and school leaders, maximising student learning outcomes through a more holistic approach to schooling.

This Capability Framework defines the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to improve or enhance knowledge in teaching to and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and applies to teaching and learning in a range of contexts including urban, regional, remote and very remote.



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are incredibly resilient, and much like their peers, come to school with a willingness and desire to learn. Like all children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students bring unique gifts and aptitudes to the classroom. With a strong sense of identity, curiosity, and agency; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are eager to be guided to success.

There is a real opportunity to ensure Australian classrooms and learning environments are places where all students feel safe to develop their identities, interests and dreams. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, this means co-creating education programs and facilitating greater student agency. Teachers, school leaders, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognise this and want to work together to ensure classrooms learning environments work for every learner.

Addressing our internal biases and assumptions and developing a greater understanding of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges is critical to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It can improve learning outcomes, strengthen engagement, and recognises that a relationship between students and teachers built on cultural respect and understanding can change lives.

## Our vision is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- are excited and motivated to go to school because their teachers encourage them through the school gate and into the classroom, ready for a day of learning. This is demonstrating high expectations.
- feel safe and valued because their teacher acknowledges and foregrounds what they bring to the classroom. This can only happen through applying a cultural responsiveness lens.
- will fully participate and contribute in the classroom and be brave and bold; they will be first to put up their hands to respond to a question or seek clarification. They will not be shame!\*
- will put their full faith and trust in their teachers, who understand and empathise with what is in their invisible backpack. Cultural responsiveness is about teachers and school leaders knowing their students.
- receive a quality education and will not be left behind because of cultural differences. Teachers and school leaders will step out of their comfort zone and experience life with different people; enriching all lives.

\* *Aboriginal English*



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# The Capability Framework

This Capability Framework (the Framework) includes a set of guiding values and principles and concrete, achievable steps you can take to embody behaviours and attitudes that are culturally responsive within your context. Ultimately this framework will support you and your colleagues to build a world class culturally responsive and capable education workforce in Australia to improve the experiences and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.

Your commitment to working towards becoming a culturally responsive practitioner has the potential to enact positive change and support cultural safety for your students and communities. The intention of this framework is to guide you towards activities, behaviours, and reflections that support your progress towards cultural responsiveness. We recommend using the **Self-Reflection Tool** before exploring this framework so that you have a clear sense of where your current attitudes, experiences and behaviours place you along the **Indigenous cultural responsiveness continuum**.





The framework is informed by the Indigenous cultural responsiveness continuum and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK	
INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT CONTINUUM	AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS
<b>Stage 1</b> Cultural Destruction	<i>Stages 1 and 2 do not align with the practices of the Teacher Standards</i>
<b>Stage 2</b> Cultural Blindness	
<b>Stage 3</b> Cultural Awareness	<b>Standard 1</b> Know students and how they learn
<b>Stage 4</b> Cultural Competency	<b>Standard 2</b> Know the content and how to teach it
<b>Stage 5</b> Cultural Responsiveness	<b>Standard 3</b> Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning
<b>Stage 6</b> Cultural Sustainability	<b>Standard 4</b> Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments
	<b>Standard 5</b> Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
	<b>Standard 6</b> Engage in professional learning
	<b>Standard 7</b> Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

Each of the stages has been defined and represented by characteristics that may be found in your teaching practice. Impacts have been included for each stage to support your understanding of the role your practice plays in the outcomes of your learners.

The **Tips to put into action** section enables you to reflect on your practice and develop strategies to build your cultural responsiveness.

It has been determined that the minimum expectation for the Australian teaching workforce, is to move beyond *Cultural Awareness*. According to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers this means that practice relating to stages 1 and 2 on the Intercultural Development Continuum are unsatisfactory for practicing teachers.

# Sections in this Framework

## CHARACTERISTICS

Stages may be characterised through actions, thoughts and feelings within education settings.

STAGE 3

### Cultural Awareness

**Intercultural Awareness**  
is recognising that there are differences and similarities between people from different backgrounds. There is some knowledge that students from different backgrounds may require different approaches. This comes through being able to identify and understand one's own beliefs, values, and practices.  
In an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education context, cultural awareness in schools means having a broad knowledge and understanding in schools about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages.

Characteristics	Evidence of impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aware of differences in knowledges, languages, and cultural identities of individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.</li> <li>Recognises own beliefs, attitudes, and practices impact the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.</li> <li>Demonstrates interest in learning about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultural identities, and perspectives.</li> <li>Demonstrates interest in establishing relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The belief that as educators and leaders their role is to provide teaching and learning experiences within the dominant, universally applicable culture. This approach <b>encourages assimilation</b> and ignores the profound impact understanding and respecting the oldest living culture on earth can provide all students, particularly the experiences and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.</li> <li>Verbalised commitment to valuing diversity, but no actions put in place.</li> <li>Understands that difference affects engagement, but not sure how to improve.</li> <li>Understands the need for family and community engagement, but uncertain about how to facilitate this.</li> <li>Beginning to understand how own attitudes and beliefs affect interactions with students.</li> <li>Maintains a paternal attitude towards people from other backgrounds.</li> <li>Views achievement as a result of how well diverse groups can conform to the languages, values and beliefs of the dominant group.</li> </ul>

“The best thing to do when teaching an Indigenous student is just be yourself.”

“I realise that my responses to difference are often destructive, and I am trying to understand how to respond in a way that is more responsive.”

“I can see how my own practices and beliefs may be a barrier to improving the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but I am not sure what to do about it.”

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

**3 tips to put into action**

- Complete a professional learning course, such as an online module, focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait knowledges, histories, cultures and languages. When choosing the course, consider whether it has been developed by an Indigenous-led organisation.
- Are you aware of the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which your school stands? Research and share what you have found with your learners and colleagues. Your local state government council may be a good starting point for this information.
- Review an upcoming teaching and learning program and identify opportunities to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as a cross-curriculum priority. How will these elaborations enrich your curriculum for learners? What implications will this have for your own professional development needs?

**Capability Framework**

**Australian Professional Standards for Teachers**

**Focus areas:**

- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- 3.2 Plan, structure and sequence learning programs
- 6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice

## IMPACTS

Unconscious biases and assumptions have the potential to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities indirectly or directly.

## TIPS TO PUT INTO ACTION

Practical tips for your ongoing cultural responsiveness development including links to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.



## Who is this Framework for?

### How to use the Framework

1. Complete the self-reflection tool
2. Use the results to locate your current stage of cultural responsiveness development
3. Read about the characteristics and impacts of each stage
4. Identify and select actions you can take to develop your skills and work towards increasing your cultural responsiveness
5. Reflect on these actions then identify and select the next actions you can take and continue this cycle

- To inform practice
- To set professional learning goals
- To identify appropriate personal and professional learning opportunities

- To inform whole school improvement goals
- To identify whole school professional growth activities and conversations



- To inform jurisdiction wide improvement goals
- To support implementation of improvement goals

- To inform practice
- To set professional learning goals
- To identify appropriate personal and professional learning opportunities

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# The Indigenous cultural responsiveness continuum

The purpose of the Indigenous cultural responsiveness continuum (the Continuum) is to assist educators and school leaders to critically reflect on and develop their ability to be more responsive to the knowledge, skills, and cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It should be used by educators and school leaders to understand how their biases and assumptions affect practices, behaviours and attitudes in ways that adversely impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and to educate all students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. The aim is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to feel culturally safe at school and for the teaching profession to celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures, and ultimately the wider community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identities are foundational to one's way of understanding the world and influence all aspects of life. The legacy of colonisation has undermined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' access to their cultures, identities, histories, and languages. The education system must embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identities so that all students

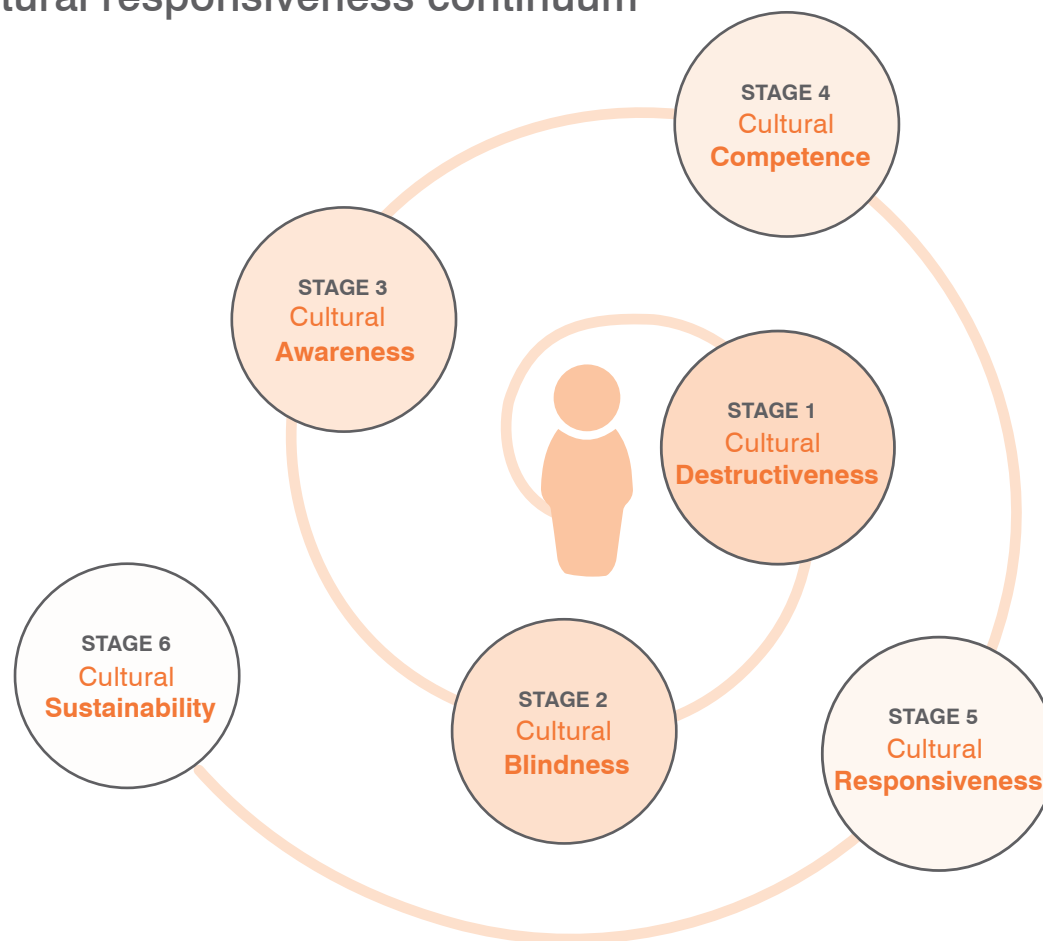
can access a complete, relevant and responsive education. Being 'responsive', in the context of this tool, is the ability to respond to the diverse knowledges, skills and cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This will look different in different contexts. Also, given the cycle of inquiry this continuum seeks to guide is a process of continuous learning, there is no end point of 'being responsive'. The stages of the continuum are therefore non-linear and cyclical.

Teachers and school leaders have not always been provided with adequate support or resources to effectively teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Yet, teachers and school leaders play a critical role in creating new and promising futures. They hold significant influence and power in being able to create change in the classroom as well as in the broader community setting. To effect this change – in conjunction with the key principles underpinning the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in accordance with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers – educators and school leaders have a responsibility to understand appropriate strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and

to promote reconciliation. The continuum supports this process through personal and professional development, or as part of family and community engagement. It is about enriching the education profession to build confidence and skills, broadening perspectives and re-imagining a shared future with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Indigenous cultural responsiveness continuum underpins this framework and describes stages of cultural responsiveness within educational settings. It is important to note that the nature of intercultural learning is **contextual**, and levels of cultural responsiveness can change across two separate settings.

## The Indigenous cultural responsiveness continuum



**Adapted from:**

Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M. (1989). Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care, Volume 1. Washington, DC: CASSP Technical Assistance Center, Center for Child Health and Mental Health Policy, Georgetown University Child Development Center

# Cultural Destructiveness

**Cultural Destructiveness** is the attitudes, policies and practices that are destructive to identities, values and practices.

It is characterised by its intentional nature and a belief that people of certain backgrounds are superior to others. Difference is not valued.

Destructiveness in schools means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages are *actively destroyed* through approaches to teaching and learning. This is done by policies and practices that promote the dominant culture as being superior and that explicitly deny the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective, pedagogies and practices.

## Characteristics

- Intentional attitudes, policies and practices that are destructive to cultures and consequently to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Belief that own background is superior to others.
- People from other backgrounds are considered unimportant and undeserving.
- Stereotyping about and/or biases against those from other backgrounds.
- Overt actions and behaviours that show that difference is not welcomed.
- Belief that harm to others on basis of background is acceptable or justified.



“I make a conscious effort [use my power] to destroy cultural identities that are different from my own by delivering content and examples that intentionally prioritises my own worldviews, values and beliefs.”

“It doesn’t matter if they were here first. We won, they lost! They need to learn to fit in here.”

“I believe that cultural identities other than my own are inferior.”

“I am unwilling to be useful or helpful to people from other backgrounds.”

## Evidence of impacts

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students avoid the classroom/school environment and do not access quality education as they feel unsafe and like they do not belong.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not engaged in learning.
- Teachers demonstrate attitudes and beliefs that position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, languages, and cultural identities as inferior.
- Teachers undermine the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through portraying that the knowledges and practices of the dominant culture are superior within the classroom.
- Teachers and school leaders destroy local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultural identities, and perspectives by promoting them as being inferior.
- Language, communication styles and approaches across the school are destructive to the histories, cultural identities, and languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and of the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Teachers and school leaders undermine the skills and knowledge of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through teaching and school activities.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families feel their contribution and participation within the school community is not welcomed or valued and have no agency in the education of their children.



# Cultural Blindness

**Cultural Blindness** is the belief that all peoples have the same needs, priorities and values and that those who are different are segregated for their own good. It is characterised by a lack of awareness about the impact of differences on understanding and interactions between people of different backgrounds. This encourages assimilation and ignores the role of power and privilege.

**Blindness** in schools means that in efforts to make it 'fair' and 'equal' for all students, there is no consideration of the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultural identities and languages on learning.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be segregated for a perceived 'common good' and their educational needs, rights and aspirations dismissed.

## Characteristics

- A lack of capacity to help minority educators and leaders who exhibit extremely biased beliefs and assumptions towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culture, or histories.
- Discomfort recognising difference.
- Dominant social group subconsciously takes actions to benefit own peoples.
- Belief that one-size-fits-all approaches are suitable for all.
- Belief that achievement is based on merit. Individuals are blamed for failures.
- Lack of awareness how one's own biases contributes to maintaining the status quo.
- Expectations for other social groups are lower due to own biases and assumptions.



"We have a good education system. It's worked all over the world for countries to become advanced societies."

"Everyone should be treated the same."

"It is the student's responsibility to stay engaged at school. It is their family's responsibility to ensure they come to school."

"I believe that dimensions of diversity are unimportant."



## Evidence of impacts

- Teachers lack of understanding about diversity of knowledges, languages, and cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Teachers demonstrate lack of understanding about the impact of their own beliefs, attitudes, and practices on the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Teachers and school leaders demonstrate no interest in creating culturally safe environments by learning about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultural identities, and perspectives, which leads to students feeling like they do not belong.
- Teachers and school leaders demonstrate no interest in establishing relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Teachers and school leaders demonstrate a lack of racial and/or systems literacy, and a lack of awareness of the historical and cultural context within which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' learning is taking place.

# Cultural Awareness

## Cultural Awareness

is recognising that there are differences and similarities between people from different backgrounds. There is some knowledge that students from different backgrounds may require different approaches. This comes through being able to identify and understand one's own beliefs, values, and practices.

This approach encourages assimilation and ignores the profound impact understanding and respecting the oldest living culture on earth can provide all students, particularly the experiences and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education context, cultural awareness in schools means having a broad knowledge and understanding in schools about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages.

## Characteristics

- The belief that as educators and leaders their role is to provide teaching and learning experiences within the dominant, universally applicable culture.
- Verbalised commitment to valuing diversity, but no actions put in place.
- Understands that difference affects engagement, but not sure how to improve.
- Understands the need for family and community engagement, but uncertain about how to facilitate this.
- Beginning to understand how own attitudes and beliefs affect interactions with students.
- Maintains a paternal attitude towards people from other backgrounds.
- Views achievement as a result of how well diverse groups can conform to the languages, values and beliefs of the dominant group.

“The best thing to do when teaching an Indigenous student is just be yourself.”

“I realise that my responses to difference are often destructive, and I am trying to understand how to respond in a way that is more responsive.”

“I can see how my own practices and beliefs may be a barrier to improving the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but I am not sure what to do about it.”

## Evidence of impacts

- Awareness of differences in knowledges, languages, and cultural identities of individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Recognises how own beliefs, attitudes, and practices impact the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Demonstrates interest in learning about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultural identities, and perspectives.
- Demonstrates interest in establishing relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**3 tips to put into action**

- 1.** Complete a professional learning course, such as an online module, focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait knowledges, histories, cultures and languages. When choosing the course, consider whether it has been developed by an Indigenous-led organisation.
- 2.** Are you aware of the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which your school stands? Research and share what you have found with your learners and colleagues. Your local state government council may be a good starting point for this information.
- 3.** Review an upcoming teaching and learning program and identify opportunities to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as a cross-curriculum priority. How will these elaborations enrich your curriculum for learners? What implications will this have for your own professional development needs?

 **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers****Focus areas:**

- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- 3.2 Plan, structure and sequence learning programs
- 6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice



# Cultural Competence

## Cultural Competence

is the ability to understand, interact and communicate with people from a background that is different to one's own, in ways that are sensitive to individual needs. It is developed through obtaining knowledge, skills and the appropriate attitudes and beliefs needed to interact with people from different backgrounds. This means valuing diverse cultural identities, knowledges and traditions and recognising the centrality of connections to family, community and Country to individual wellbeing.

Cultural Competence in schools means understanding the needs, rights and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and of their diverse histories, cultural identities and languages. It also means valuing critical self-reflection, as well as critical relationship building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community. School staff respect diversity and recognise the need for active commitment and change at all levels in education approaches.

## Characteristics

- Often lead by the educators and leaders own desire to undertake inclusive practices and embrace diversity.
- Expresses commitment to and values diversity.
- Engages in critical self-reflection to understand how their attitudes and behaviours influences perspective.
- Engages with diverse groups and endeavours to ensure their values, beliefs and needs are considered in decision making and action.
- Demonstrates behaviours and actions that value diversity as defined by diverse groups.
- Actively develops intercultural knowledge and skills.
- Actively seeks input from diverse groups and takes action to meet needs.



"I know my boss, an Aboriginal woman, and I, a white man, have had different life experiences but we're learning how to work together."

"I value cultural diversity and make changes to my own practice to cater to cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students."

"I understand it is my responsibility to create a safe and supportive environment for all students."



## Evidence of impacts

- Teachers understand the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, languages, and cultural identities of individual students.
- Teachers and school leaders have a basic understanding of the impact of their own biases and assumptions on the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and are starting to critically reflect on their own practices.
- Understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultures and histories that may lack depth and breadth can result in tokenism, evidenced by actions that don't consistently contribute to meaningful change and positive benefits for learners.
- Teachers and school leaders have a basic understanding about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultural identities, and perspectives.
- Relationships have been established with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

**3 tips to put into action**

- 1.** Ask for feedback from learners and their families, such as through a learner perception and/or family engagement survey. Find out what they like most about your setting, least about your setting and what they wish to see improved. Use this feedback to develop a plan for developing a more culturally safe and welcoming learning environment.
- 2.** Meaningful relationships with learners, families and wider communities enhance learning and development. In what ways do you encourage participation and contributions from families and communities? Share your approach with a colleague or mentor, unpack challenges, and discuss strategies to engage meaningfully with families.
- 3.** Set up a localised list of individuals and organisations who can provide cultural authority and guidance; for example in the areas of the arts, sports, language, history, and storytelling. From this list, reach out to someone within an area that is relevant to your upcoming teaching and learning program, and to the interest and aspirations of your learners. Grow your list over time.

 **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers****Focus areas:**

2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

4.1 Support student participation

7.3 Engage with the parents/carers

# Cultural Responsiveness

## Cultural Responsiveness

is a high level of proficiency of understanding, interacting and communicating effectively and sensitively with people from a different background. Diversity is respected and prioritised by individuals through ongoing self-reflection and learning, and continued commitment to improving practices and relationships. Individuals demonstrate commitment to mutually respectful relationships with local communities and work collaboratively to set the directions and priorities for the school.

Responsiveness in schools means that educators and school leaders are responsive to the diverse histories, cultural identities and languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and use these as a basis to facilitate learning opportunities.

## Characteristics

- Acceptance of lack of understanding and motivation to continue to learn and improve. This is characterised by ongoing self-assessment, careful attention to respect difference, continuous expansion of knowledge and resources and adaptation of services to better meet the needs of diverse populations.
- There is a commitment to do better, but this is based on educator/leader determined approaches.
- Continually looks outside one's own worldview to improve understanding.
- Attitudes are characterised by an understanding of self and others (both separate and connected).
- Relationships are authentic.
- Practices are considered genuine from the perspective of diverse groups.
- Responsive practices are constructive and facilitate ongoing learning.



"I would like to investigate the different perspectives of the Koorie and non-Indigenous staff who were involved in the dispute and use some cross-cultural conflict resolution approaches to try and resolve it."

"I understand and value the way that the worldviews, values and beliefs of diverse groups shape the way that we engage in education."

"I enjoy learning from, rather than feeling threatened by, self-reflection."

"I am challenging my own beliefs and assumptions about students, families, and communities, and encouraging my colleagues to do the same."



## Evidence of impacts

- Teachers promote the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, languages, and cultural identities in their teaching and understand how to contextualise their pedagogies and practices to reflect local community priorities.
- Teachers and school leaders have a strong understanding about the impact of their own biases and assumptions on the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and aim to continuously reflect on and improve their practices.
- Teachers and school leaders have a strong understanding about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives are engaged in ongoing learning about these, and use this in their teaching for all students.
- Language, communication styles and approaches to teaching affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identities.
- Positive, trusting relationships exist with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are highly engaged in learning.
- Positive, trusting relationships exist with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- The knowledges and perspectives of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community inform decisions in the classroom and learning environment.



### 3 tips to put into action

1. Building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is critical to understanding their needs, rights and aspirations. During an upcoming performance and development or school improvement planning process, identify a role you can play to support relationship strengthening and collaboration with communities. When appropriate, take the next steps towards collaboratively setting goals for your teaching and your school.
2. [Enablers for effective professional conversations](#) are the conditions and processes that support teachers and school leaders to examine their practice and commit to making appropriate changes for improvement. Meet with a colleague(s) and review the enablers together. Find examples of strengths that exist in your school in the areas of resources, relationships, processes, knowledge, and culture that you can build on to develop greater cultural responsiveness together.
3. Think about your responsibility to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and about Indigenous histories and cultures with all learners. Reflect on your current classroom environment and the teaching/learning resources you use. Consider who is represented and how? What are the implications and what might you change? What other perspectives could you consider? Take steps to replace or renew resources, as appropriate, in response to these reflections.

## Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

### Focus areas:

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

6.3 Engage with colleagues and improve practice

7.4 Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities

# Cultural Sustainability

## Cultural Sustainability is

responsiveness that is actively sustained through systems, policies, practices and partnerships that enable ongoing learning and self-reflection for understanding, interacting and communicating with people from different backgrounds. Systems and processes that respect diversity, ongoing self-reflection, expansion of knowledge is embedded in schools and in relationships with local communities, and there is ongoing commitment to improving practices and relationships. While this is the highest level of practice, 'responsiveness' can never be achieved. Learning must be ongoing and sustained.

Sustainability in schools means that educators and school leaders continually aim to strengthen mutually respectful, ongoing relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, value their strengths, and work collaboratively to implement and be accountable to the directions and priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the school.

## Characteristics

- Actively building relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Seeking to add to the knowledge base of responsive practice by conducting research, influencing approaches to care, and improving relations between people from different backgrounds.
- Genuine self-determination understands this is to be led by the experiences, perspectives and profound knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or communities.
- Responsive practices are embedded across the system.
- Policies are inclusive and are used to guide practice.
- Long term partnerships with diverse groups have been established and are based on trust and mutual respect.



"I understand my preference for the way I was brought up and I can see the value of ways of doing things in this other culture."

"I meet the needs of all my students by using responsive teaching in the classroom."

"People at all levels of my school are practicing in responsive ways and work in partnership with the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community to ensure the cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are respected and valued."

"I have spent time getting to know my students, their families and the community in which the school resides. We use these relationships as a resource for teaching all students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives and cultural identities."



## Evidence of impacts

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel safe, valued and like they belong in all aspects of school activities.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participate fully in the classroom and learning environment.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receive a meaningful, quality education.
- Teachers and school leaders promote the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, languages, and cultural identities in their teaching and throughout the wider school and community context.
- There are systems in place that ensure continuous reflection and learning of teachers and school leaders about the impact of personal biases and assumptions on the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Schools hold regular activities for learning about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultural identities, and perspectives, led by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Language, communication styles and approaches across the school affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identities.
- The local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has a formalised leadership role within the school.



### 3 tips to put into action

1. Watch this 3-minute [Illustration of Practice on implementing an Indigenous language program](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/implementing-an-indigenous-language-program) – [www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/implementing-an-indigenous-language-program](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/implementing-an-indigenous-language-program). In this illustration, the school and the community had a common goal to build language skills. What might be the common goal for your school community for the coming year? How can you define this goal collaboratively? Who might partner in this work?
2. Reflect on the previous year and the individuals in your school who led and worked on cultural responsiveness learning and community engagement initiatives. How are roles and responsibilities shared? What processes could be formalised to ensure that expertise is built and sustained over time? How can you contribute?
3. Cultural load is an important consideration when partnering with local Elders and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and other staff in schools. Identify the approach in your classroom and education setting to ensure cultural knowledge is appropriately recognised and remunerated. What could be improved to reduce the cultural burden for individuals and ensure school priorities align with community aspirations?

### Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

#### Focus areas:

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

6.3 Engage with colleagues and improve practice

7.2 Comply with legislative, administrative and organisational requirements

7.4 Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities









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