

Building a culturally responsive Australian teaching workforce

Final report for Indigenous
cultural competency project

June 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.

Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce project

June 2022

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was tasked by the then Minister for Education, the Honourable Dan Tehan, through a Letter of Instruction, to work with the profession to scope and develop a suite of professional learning resources to build or enhance the cultural competency of the existing teaching workforce and increase cultural safety in schools. The work tasked was to develop a whole of school 'roadmap' approach by which teachers and school leaders will be able to access the developed outputs that best suit their existing knowledge and/or context and partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts and the profession to deliver this work.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership was formed to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession for teaching and school leadership with funding provided by the Australian Government.



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.

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Foreword



Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce

June 2022

Over the last three years, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has had the privilege of facilitating work to explore Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce. This report brings together findings from the extensive research and consultation effort that has taken place as part of this project.

AITSL has consulted widely with the profession, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts, students, families, and communities. I thank every person who so generously offered their time, knowledge and experiences; whether by responding to the discussion paper, participating in an online forum or joining us on Ngunnawal Country at the National Dialogue last year.

I wish to particularly acknowledge Ms Carly Jia for her contribution to this work. Carly is a Badulaig, Meriam and Yidinji woman and the Senior Adviser for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education at AITSL. She has led this project with distinction, supported by members of the AITSL Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. I am confident that in time we will find this work has made a lasting impression not just at AITSL, but on the profession as a whole.

It is clear that teachers must do more than simply know and deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content. Teachers must immerse themselves in Indigenous knowledges and experiences, supported by institutional action at the school, system and sector level.

Teachers play a formative role in the lives of all Australian children – and so it is incumbent on each of us to advance the important work of reconciliation. We must be prepared to have uncomfortable conversations, to reflect on our unconscious biases, to acknowledge the great wrongs that occurred in our past, and to challenge ourselves to work towards a better future.

In the coming months, AITSL will release online resources that support teachers to identify their existing level of cultural capability and guide them into the areas where they should focus efforts to further develop their knowledge and skills.

I encourage all teachers to take up this opportunity and commit themselves to advancing along the cultural continuum – not only for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, but for all learners, and in turn for the benefit of our nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Hattie'.

Emeritus Laureate Professor John Hattie

Chair, AITSL Board of Directors

A message from the AITSL Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

As members of AITSL's Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education (AGATSIE), and as a collective, it has been an honour and a privilege to be a part of the design, delivery and vision of this project: Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce.

Our ancestors, our Elders, and our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education colleagues have led this work for generations. They continue to leave an incredible legacy for us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in education to continue the work and advocacy for the right to a complete, relevant, and culturally responsive education.

As stated in the discussion paper, Australian education systems were never designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The legacy of colonisation – including its policies, systems and structures – still exists today and continues to undermine the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to a fair and just education as any student in this nation. Pledging to a rights-based education, informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), we begin to develop a powerful counter narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education excellence moving beyond the colonial deficit.

We had an opportunity to bring the profession and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people together, to the table, which was an extraordinary undertaking and have the profession sit alongside us and hear our stories, our concerns, and our solutions to how we can move toward a more equal and equitable educational experience and outcomes for our people. The willingness to engage in challenging conversations and the unpacking that took place to gain a better understanding of where we want teachers and school leaders to be, demonstrated how brave and committed the profession is in supporting this work and implementing this movement into their spheres of influence.

We have heard from our people loud and clear about what really matters to them and what is of significant importance to their children, their families, and their communities. We have translated these needs and desires into a suite of recommendations that we strongly encourage you to take the time and dedication to really understand; and then to work within your environments to act and reimagine what education looks like for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and for all students moving forward.

The detrimental gaps apparent between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples is a social justice issue. It is an economic issue. It is a political issue. Addressing this issue is not possible if change does not occur. Addressing this issue is only possible if teachers and the systems they work within are willing to make the necessary changes and reflect on themselves and their structures.



Renez Lammon

Co-Chair, Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education



Carly Jia

Co-Chair, Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

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Executive summary

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, though, 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. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have not had access to a complete, relevant, and responsive education. Being an institution of the dominant or mainstream culture, Australian education systems reflect the values, norms and world views of that culture. Consequently, inequitable education outcomes have often been viewed as deficiencies or failures on the part of the student, rather than a failure of our systems.

This project emphasises that ultimately it is the responsibility of teachers, school leaders and whole-school communities to meet the learning and wellbeing needs and support the aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and indeed all students. While the focus of this project is the Australian teaching workforce, AITSL understands that all staff within education systems must build their cultural responsiveness if there is to be genuinely positive shifts in achieving more equitable educational opportunities, experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students irrespective of which school they attend or where they live.

From the outset it must be acknowledged that the term 'cultural competence' is contentious and viewed by many as ambiguous, inadequate and inappropriate. The term has been used as 'working terminology' for the project, consistent with the language within the Letter of Instruction by the then Minister for Education. Determining and defining relevant and appropriate language, in partnership with groups of expert stakeholders, has been an important step. The appropriate terms (including for practice that goes beyond cultural competence to incorporate cultural responsiveness) will be outlined in an intercultural development continuum, as part of this project and in partnership with the convening of AITSL's Critical Focus Group and Co-design Network Group.

Central to this project is the identification of the processes teachers and school leaders can undertake to critically understand, continually develop, and effectively exercise their cultural responsiveness. This project also aims to provide teachers and school leaders with guidance on the contextualisation, critical reflection and use of relevant resources and tools to help them improve or enhance their pedagogical practice in culturally responsive and sustainable ways. The development of these resources and tools will augment AITSL's existing collection of evidence-informed products to assist teachers and school leaders to improve their practice, many of which have been incorporated into system and sector professional learning programs and opportunities.

A further focus of this project work is to increase the understanding of cultural safety in Australian schools. Such an understanding will enable schools to develop supportive teaching and learning environments that are conducive to meeting the learning needs and aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teachers, and ancillary staff along with the needs and aspirations of families and communities.

AITSL recognises there are many complex factors impacting on the development of a culturally responsive teaching workforce. This report looks at the issues that were strongly and consistently identified through the consultation process as areas requiring improvement or reform.

The recommendations in this report are the direct result of an extensive national consultation process that commenced in 2019. In September 2020, AITSL released its discussion paper, *Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce*. The discussion paper provided the framework for the online forums that were conducted in all states and territories in late 2020. Individuals and organisations were also invited to respond to the discussion paper through written submissions, of which 87 were received. The online forums and written submissions formed the basis for the two-day National Dialogue that followed in Canberra in May 2021.

It should be noted that although a number of these recommendations are outside the scope of AITSL's remit they are key factors in developing cultural responsiveness across the Australian teaching workforce. Recommendations 1 to 3 of this paper reflect responses that fall within AITSL's field of influence to undertake, and work has progressed to develop of these important professional learning resources. Recommendations 4 to 10, while not within the scope of this project, are integral in addressing the complexities of a holistic and sustainable approach to cultural safety in Australian schools. All recommendations would require collaboration and consultation with other organisations and bodies with associated responsibilities.

Recommendations

- 1 Provide teachers and school leaders with self-reflection tools** to support them to increase their awareness of the assumptions underlying their personal identity in culture. This recommendation responds to the widespread acknowledgements in the consultation of the need for educators to be more self-aware regarding the role of their personal identity, attitudes, and assumptions in their interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The self-reflection support tool should be designed to complement Recommendations 2, 3, and 4.
- 2 Formalise and strengthen the commitment to building the cultural responsiveness of the education workforce** by developing an **intercultural development continuum** that supplements the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) and the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Principal Standard). This continuum will provide a shared language and understanding while reflecting the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- 3 Develop a capability framework** to provide teachers and school leaders with insight into the forms of support, experiences and reflection that are associated with different levels of intercultural learning. The capability framework aims to create an interactive tool to guide educators to appropriate and relevant professional learning and resources that meet identified needs relating to cultural responsiveness and sustainability.
- 4 Collaborate on the curation of professional development offerings and resources** (both currently used and previously successful) into a central hub, to provide schools and teachers a validated source of appropriate quality professional development programs and resources categorised by learning need.
- 5 Collaborate on the co-design of a new national overarching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy** (the Strategy) and ensure that the group overseeing the development, implementation and evaluation of the Strategy is representative of key stakeholders at state, territory and national levels.
- 6 Collaborate with higher education providers and teacher registration bodies to strengthen requirements of initial teacher education (ITE) programs** to focus on culturally responsive practice and leadership. Ideally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content should be included as a mandatory unit of study or indeed, mandatory cross-curricula focus, within ITE programs.
- 7 Work with higher education providers and teacher registration bodies to examine current practicum approaches within ITE** with a focus on their efficacy in supporting the development of culturally responsive practice across different contexts for beginning teachers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pre-service teachers.
- 8 Work with teacher registration bodies, employing authorities, education unions and higher education providers to explore approaches to increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders.** This may include the recognition of non-traditional qualifications / experiences and alternate pathways to entry.
- 9 Conduct a detailed examination of the current state of staff turnover across schools of all types and jurisdictions,** but particularly in remote and very remote contexts. The negative impact of uncontrolled turnover is well documented in the research and noted in the consultation. The review should also examine the role of current selection/recruitment methods applied across contexts and their relationship to staff turnover.
- 10 Collaborate with wider education sector stakeholders to co-design stronger metrics and data collection/reporting processes to capture and assess good practice** pertaining to 'Cultural Responsiveness, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education' and related foci such as 'Reconciliation in Education'.

Key findings

The importance of a shared language and understanding

Throughout the consultation process, 'cultural competency' was used as a working term to facilitate conversation about the topic. From the outset it was clear that the term 'cultural competency' was problematic. The term is viewed by many as ambiguous, inadequate, inappropriate and even offensive.

Risks identified though consultations included:

- teachers sometimes interpret cultural competency as an imperative or assumption to 'teach culture', rather than simply teach about culture or facilitate culturally responsive learning experiences in collaboration with community.
- often, 'culture' gets reduced to the visible/performative aspects of culture alone. For example, "...cultural competence can be reduced to a checklist approach of 'dos' and 'don'ts' (Ladson-Billings, 2017), resulting in superficial, essentialist and reductionist understanding of students' home cultures." (Submission 9).
- focusing on (Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) 'culture' may indirectly deflect from the importance of teachers focusing on their own views, biases, competencies, and areas for development; and,
- focusing on (Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) 'culture' may also deflect from considering the significance of the relationships and distinctions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'culture(s)' and 'school culture' more broadly.

These concerns were further compounded by the notion of 'competency' which is often used synonymously for skill or proficiency attainment and viewed as an end state, something that has been achieved, or a basic benchmark standard.

There was need to engage in further national discussion to create a shared understanding of the active principles, processes, and practices that the term 'cultural competency' is attempting to capture and to reach consensus about which term best captures these principles, processes, and practices. The national discussion also assisted in clarifying what cultural competency is not.

The consensus was that rather than 'competency', the appropriate terms should reflect an ongoing (not always linear) process of personal and professional learning. The adopted terms should reflect that developing cultural responsiveness is about life-long learning and personal growth.

This project has sought to develop a nationally consistent definition and language of cultural competency in the Australian education context, all the while acknowledging the interrelationship between the education context and a range of other contexts such as health, welfare, and justice. It has aimed to leverage the value of a national approach while acknowledging the high-quality approaches that are already underway, and in many cases, well embedded in some jurisdictional systems and sectors. A shared language and understanding are critical for all recommendations but particularly recommendations 1 to 3. The tools and resources, currently under development as part of Recommendations 1 to 3 of this report, will include language that extends beyond 'competency' to capture culturally responsive and sustainable practices.

The cultural safety of Australian education settings

The cultural safety of Australian schools and other education settings for students, teachers, and ancillary staff is foundational to meeting the learning needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, along with the needs and aspirations of their families and communities. The remit of this project was to build the Indigenous cultural competency of the teaching workforce with the goal of increasing cultural safety in schools. The current experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the workforce provided important insight for the project.

There is limited research into workforce experiences for Indigenous peoples that has not been primarily conducted and reported by non-Indigenous people. Research conducted by the Jumbunna Institute and Diversity Council Australia and presented in the Gari Yala report¹ adds to the picture of the need for greater cultural safety in schools as workplaces and learning environments. This research drew on the insights and experiences of 1,033 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers and found that for many people, racism at work is endemic. This research identified:

- Over a quarter of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people surveyed work in culturally unsafe workplaces, including experiences of low representation, not feeling valued, and not feeling comfortable expressing cultural or personal beliefs.
- Over a third of workers carry the burden of high cultural load, an often-invisible load borne by one or a limited number of Indigenous staff including extra work demands, expectation to educate others, and to represent all Indigenous people.
- Almost two-thirds of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers surveyed experience high 'identity strain' (a term coined by the research team) referring to feelings that they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace. The concept draws on literature demonstrating members of minority groups expend effort and energy managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation.

Gari Yala, which means 'speak the truth' in Wiradjuri language, provides unique insight because it reports on the first-hand experiences of a diverse group of Indigenous peoples in workplaces across Australia. It is an important addition to the picture painted by the findings from consultation conducted through this project. Listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can guide employers within the education system to target workforce development initiatives to what is genuinely needed.

1. Diversity Council Australia/ Jumbunna Institute (Brown, C., D'Almada-Remedios, R., Gilbert, J. O'Leary, J. and Young, N.) Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): Centring the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia/ Jumbunna Institute, 2020.

One of the recommendations of Gari Yala was for employers to focus on creating environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel they belong. It found that initiatives commonly focus on building Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff capacity and capability and failed to consider how culturally safe and inclusive the workplace is for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

The 'how' of building a culturally responsive teaching workforce

Being 'culturally responsive', in the context of Australian schools, 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. Being culturally responsive is a process of continuous learning; one can never be 'responsive'. Teachers need guidance and support to understand how best to engage in such a process for their learning to be relevant, targeted to their needs and ultimately effective in improving their practice for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Both the online forums and written submissions highlighted factors underpinning the ways in which cultural responsiveness may be built. These factors relate to all levels of education, that is, individual, institutional, sectoral, and systemic. To help structure the outcomes from the consultation, the themes and issues have been organised in terms of the types of interaction to which they refer. While many of these themes are larger than the scope of this specific project, the complexities of achieving a culturally responsive education workforce mean that these themes are important to understanding and improving the broader context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Factors exploring the 'how' of building a culturally responsive teaching workforce are described in the following sections across levels of education from individual to institutional to sectoral/systemic.

Individual

Cultural responsiveness at the classroom level relates primarily to the individual teacher-student interaction. It draws in the assumptions and dispositions of the teacher; the relationships built between teachers, students, and families; the pedagogy enacted; and the interpretation of the curriculum as well as individual curriculum resources. Cultural responsiveness in the classroom recognises that teaching takes place across a diverse range of contexts with very different characteristics.

“Becoming and remaining culturally competent is not something that you can do via a single workshop to tick a box—it needs to be constantly reflected on and developed.”

(Submission 67)

“People have to be prepared to ... to learn and unlearn, be curious to seeking more understanding, be self-reflective, to seek truths and strive to recognise or be aware and acknowledge ... unconscious bias.”

(Submission 66)

Approaches and pedagogies that are culturally responsive in one context may not be appropriate in others. For example, the practices of cultural responsiveness in classrooms without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will look and feel different to that demonstrated in remote communities with predominantly Indigenous student cohorts. Despite these differences, culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum offerings should be present in all classrooms. Teachers need to be responsive to context and willing and able to change their approach from student to student, class to class and school to school.

The path to cultural responsiveness will be unique to each teacher and a function of their “life experiences, their teacher education, their previous teaching placements and their levels of immersion in Indigenous communities.” (Submission 82) Additionally, lifelong learning within a system that sustains, supports and resources teachers and leaders to develop their practice to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners is fundamental to building cultural responsiveness.

Central to this ongoing learning journey is the process of critical reflection.

Critical self-reflection

The importance of critical self-reflection was highlighted in all stages of the consultation process. Part of the reason for this is that while other factors such as relationship building, content, and pedagogical approach are seen as crucial, the cultural responsiveness of the teacher is ultimately a function of their worldview and implicit biases. These assumptions inform the way teachers bring processes of relationship building and pedagogy together. Unquestioned, they can hold unhelpful patterns of interaction and racism thereby limiting outcomes for students and teachers. Consequently, the ability of teachers, students and community to critically reflect on unhelpful and erroneous attitudes, assumptions and actions will be key to achieving a culturally responsive teaching workforce.

Building cultural responsiveness involves more than re-learning history to unlearn biases. It also requires teachers and school leaders to reflect on who they are and on their preconceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, all the while having the capacity to actively listen.

This form of reflection is complex and much more profound than simply increasing awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. They must immerse themselves in the Indigenous knowledges and experiences.

“Culture cannot be academically communicated. It can only be experienced as an embodied mind that is unsettled by both the positive and negative moral upset experienced in the intercultural.”

(Submission 88)

“There needs to be an ability and openness to see the big picture and the willingness to share, to listen and to learn. Individuals should have a strong sense of their own personal identity and story, recognising how important this is for others.”

(Submission 36)

“Opportunities for students to be assessed via their first language (where relevant/responsive to do so) and according to more culturally informed assessment criteria.”

(SA Forum)

Many of the submissions referred to the tokenistic and performative signs and symbols of cultural responsiveness and inclusion such as artwork, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, the presence of books and resources, NAIDOC week and National Reconciliation Week celebrations and Acknowledgement of Country. While important, these signs and symbols only become meaningful when they form a part of an authentic whole that requires teachers and school leaders to each have a clear sense of their own personal identity and each have a personal investment in ‘why’ they participate in a symbolic or practical demonstration of cultural responsiveness. If individuals become self-aware about the role culture plays in both creating and maintaining personal identity, they come to know and be responsive to alternative cultures and world views.

Not only do individuals need to personally engage or connect with Indigenous communities and the voices of the students that they teach, but they also need the willingness and time to reflect on this experience.

Genuine critical reflection requires a willingness on the part of the individual to actively engage and listen. Individuals also need to feel safe to examine their world views and assumptions. Of equal importance, is the commitment of school leadership and school/system policies to model the processes of critical reflection and to provide the time and resources to enable individuals to self-reflect, listen and genuinely engage.

Creating culturally safe classrooms and schools

Historically, schools have not always been safe spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is something teachers and school leaders need to address by actively and respectfully being mindful that culturally safe schools ensure *“access to Country, community, culture, language and First Nations concepts of success and achievement.”* (Submission 2)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, like all students, are empowered when they are encouraged to be involved in making real decisions with respect to the learning process. Consequently, it is essential that cultural responsiveness is embedded in all aspects of the teaching and learning process, including in assessment methods, pedagogy, and curriculum content as well as in school/system governance structures and policy/decision-making processes. As observed in other areas of the report, solutions will be different in different contexts.

Culturally informed assessment practices can be very complex, particularly where there are multiple language groups in a single classroom. Activities like translation of signage in the school or classroom, the presence of local artwork, and other community specific artifacts provide a medium through which strength-based approaches can be initiated to contribute to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These types of responses need to be undertaken in consultation with the local community to ensure they are contextually as well as culturally appropriate.

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, cultures and histories makes learning meaningful, purposeful, and relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It is also important to ensure that physical spaces are organised and used in ways that are inclusive of, and respectful to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Building relationships

Building relationships is a topic that pervades all elements of cultural responsiveness. Relationships occur at, and affect, all levels of education systems, however, the most impactful relationship is that between the teacher and their students. Without a positive, respectful, and reciprocal high expectations relationship, there can be no understanding of the child and no opportunity for culturally responsive practice, closing off learning opportunities for everyone (teachers and students).

The nature of these relationships and the scope of what they involve, will vary considerably between contexts but always worthy of consideration are “local, place-based approaches developed in consultation with the local community, drawing on the co-design process.” Teachers and school leaders should also be mindful that *“two-way learning and on-country learning programs provide opportunity for collaboration with the local community.”* (Submission 40)

Teachers who fail to engage with the local community often struggle to build trusting relationships with students and their families. It is this lack of engagement that also contributes to the cohort of teachers that ‘don’t last long’, particularly teachers who leave remote service with negative views that are often portrayed to their colleagues as a deterrent to remote service. It is acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people highly value relationships (of primary importance in culture and society) and respectful, productive relationships are key in effecting positive change.

Building relationships is a necessary part of being an active member in any community and crucially, a lack of relationships and trust will often lead to students not attending school and becoming disengaged from education.

“Asking once is not enough... Above all we have to be very aware that assumptions can cause huge problems. We must always be searching for assumptions and check their validity.”

(Submission 27)

Teachers need to engage with students and their families beyond the school gate to understand their world and what they bring with them to school instead of the expectation to meet on school grounds.

Dealing with the fear of offending

In equal measure, submissions to the consultation spoke to the need for teachers to 'be brave' in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledges, as well as speaking to the fear teachers had of offending. While the fear of offending is genuine for many, for others it provides a screen for an unwillingness to engage for reasons ranging from laziness to ignorance to racism.

There is a danger, particularly in some of the racism narrative of oversimplifying an incredibly complex milieu of history, guilt, ignorance, pain, dislocation, and a socio-political context that seeks to reverse colonialist assumptions in systems like education. This oversimplification presents itself in a range of ways including in assumptions of pan-Aboriginality that, in the words of one submission, treat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as "...a single amorphous blob [who] enjoy a singular, fixed, internally solidary culture..." (Submission 49). These assumptions and narratives lead to counterproductive outcomes and obfuscate the diverse range of cultures, circumstances and needs that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to education. In practice teachers need to be responsive to this diversity – not an idealised concept of pan-Aboriginality.

"...it is wrong to flippantly tell teachers and leaders to 'be brave', in the face of what can be awful vitriol when trying to engage with Indigenous issues."

(Submission 49)

"I must be alert to genuine opportunities to demonstrate uncontrived generosity and willingness to learn. I can never know another culture as it knows itself; so I don't pretend I ever will. Invite people to tell you when you say or do something 'silly'."

(Submission 88)

Although the fear of offence cannot be viewed as a legitimate reason not to change practice, the fear is real and should not be ignored. The expectations placed on teachers and the school/system processes, policies and supports available for them also need to be considered.

Cultural safety should be present for everyone, including teachers working in and with another culture that is different from their own.

Ultimately, what is required is a willingness to learn and share.

For cultural responsiveness to be achieved, both practical and effective professional development and support for deep critical reflection are essential.

Institutional

At the school and community level, the focus shifts to school leadership, policy, and support structures for teachers. The initial consultations highlighted that all teachers need to be culturally responsive to navigate a globalised world. Cultural responsiveness is not a skill reserved just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, nor is it just for non-Indigenous teachers who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Teachers and school leaders need to be more than just culturally aware and sensitive—they must also be able to bridge cultural differences in ever shifting demographics. This requires having a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, including an understanding that not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or cultures are the same. Effective community engagement is built on trust, respect, and reciprocity within a context of authentic, purposeful, and productive relationships that focus on supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child at school.

Support from school leadership

Support and commitment from school leadership are critical enablers in the development of a culturally responsive teaching workforce. As established in the previous section, teachers need to value, respect and engage in the experience of other cultures and to re-evaluate their own attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs. School leaders play an important role in helping teachers to engage in this important learning, and to lead and develop school policies and structures that support this to occur.

Cultural responsiveness needs to be supported through strong and committed leadership. In consultations, stakeholders acknowledged that where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are achieving well there is always a committed principal who has ensured Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are at school, engaged in learning, and making consistent progress. This commitment must become embedded in the culture of the school which is very much situated within the remit of school leaders. Principals and other school leaders need to ensure that the development of cultural responsiveness is a core competency of each staff member's professional development and learning. School leaders must also articulate the importance of cultural responsiveness to all staff and include their school community in the process. Most importantly, school leaders must lead by example.

The significant role of critical reflection in the development of teachers' cultural responsiveness has already been discussed; however, this needs to be operationalised across a school and the system it operates in. Stakeholders reinforced that self-reflection should be embedded in schools' planning days and should be revisited regularly (not as a one-off compliance exercise).

“It requires an examination of deeply held beliefs, conscious and unconscious, to build on a new set of behaviours, practices and systems. It requires leaders to ask: Who is being well served? And who is left out or harmed by the policies and practices of the organisation?”

(Submission 40)

“[Professional learning] should not be focused on teachers alone as administrators are usually the first point of contact. That is to say, the whole school community needs to be culturally competent and not just teachers.”

(Submission 48)

“To accompany the focus on pedagogy, each school would need to develop a localised curriculum and teach local knowledges, cultural values, histories, social structures and norms, ethics and politics.”

(Submission 49)

“Approaches must be conscious to minimise burden or overwhelming local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. Part of understanding a school’s cultural context is to consider if there are other schools that will need to engage with the same local community. A joined-up approach, across schools, with education authorities and relevant Indigenous organisations can be beneficial in building sustainable relationship without overwhelming or creating duplication.”

(Submission 43)

The national forums and written submissions both emphasised that cultural responsiveness should be ingrained into the operating model and school improvement agenda of every Australian school. Moreover, this commitment should be holistically and sustainably shared not just by school leadership, but all teaching and non-teaching staff including those who develop policies at a system level.

Localised solutions based on genuine relationships

The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their histories, and their circumstances require a strong local emphasis in both the design and implementation of culturally responsive schooling. Historical interactions with, and experiences of, Australian education systems impact the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engage with schools to this day. These histories also mean that each school and community have a different starting point and different needs. Throughout the consultation process the importance of localised solutions was regularly highlighted.

It is important to develop authentic and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as these relationships can bring unique and rich perspectives to individuals and those around them.

Relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should always be respectful, and the cultural load should always be acknowledged. Several submissions noted the risk of overburdening local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, for example:

The question of how Indigenous communities can be compensated for their time supporting the learning of non-Indigenous teachers was also raised numerous times. As such, it is crucial that teachers and school leaders conduct their own initial research on the land they live, local histories, language, and culture so that it is not always the responsibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to educate non-Indigenous teachers and school leaders. School frameworks and resources, as well as local interschool networks should play an important role in establishing genuine relationships and a shared responsibility for developing culturally responsive schools and communities.

The forums also discussed the value of providing dedicated and responsive leadership and governance opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of school communities whether as school board members, parent or student council representatives, curriculum or faculty leaders, mentors, or in recruitment panel positions.

School improvement plans should have cultural responsiveness at their core, be developed in collaboration with the local community and include practical ways to implement cultural responsiveness on a daily basis.

Stakeholders also reinforced the importance of strong staff induction processes, whereby staff learn more than just the history of the local community. Staff must also learn about the history of the school and how understanding this history – in its interrelationship with the current context – can better shape the school’s collaboration with community.

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)

A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a formal statement of commitment to reconciliation and Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali platform provides a practical framework for schools and early learning services to genuinely engage in processes of reconciliation. Even where RAPs were not explicitly referenced, many of the proposed solutions put forward in the submissions can also clearly be mapped to one or more RAP actions.

Submissions claimed that developing a RAP provided a whole-school approach to building strong community relationships and an increased awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, histories and cultures. It was identified that, as a framework for action and accountability, a RAP is useful starting point and continuing reference, reflection and guidance point if embedded alongside other culturally safe processes, frameworks and policies.

Qualitative findings from an evaluation project of Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education initiative have shown that schools and early learning services are likely to need additional support in this area. A number of aspects of the Narragunnawali Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) framework for schools and early learning services build on this need for community contact. Specific RAP actions that fall into this category (to a greater or lesser degree) include building relationships with community, having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the classroom, sharing histories and cultures, family and community rooms, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses, conducting Welcome to Country and/or Acknowledgement of Country, visits to local heritage sites, events, and excursions and the creation of stakeholder lists.

Sectoral and systemic

There were several system / sector level challenges identified through the consultation, ranging from curriculum to recruitment and training of teachers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), as well as issues of funding and time. While most of these concerns are out of scope for this project or beyond AITSL's remit, AITSL recognises there are many factors that contribute to the development of a culturally responsive teaching workforce. Issues that were strongly and consistently identified as requiring improvement or reform are addressed here, as they are key factors in developing cultural responsiveness.

Curriculum

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority of the Australian Curriculum plays a role in engaging Indigenous students with education. The implementation of Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum is an opportunity to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to see themselves, their identities, cultures, and knowledge systems reflected in what they are learning. Not surprisingly, the Intercultural Understanding general capability also has a significant role to play in this space. If the cross-curriculum priority and the general capability are incorporated authentically and respectfully, there can be improved cultural safety in the classroom, an increase in student engagement and attendance, consequently, improved educational experiences and outcomes.

The consultation process highlighted that there is still much to do to improve teacher capability to embed Indigenous perspectives. To this end, professional learning and access to appropriate teaching and learning resources are vitally important as is the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. The upcoming introduction of Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum will be an important time to explore how to best support teachers to deliver on all areas of the curriculum holistically and in a culturally respectful manner.

Initial teacher education

The importance of including cultural responsiveness and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies within initial teacher education (ITE) was a consistent theme throughout the consultations. Teachers acknowledged that, without the establishment of strong foundations in their professional practice, there was a tendency to revert to methodologies and beliefs embedded during their own education. It is critical that ITE programs prepare teachers for the wide range of students they may teach, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

“[Practicum teachers were told by supervising teachers that] they did not need to plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content delivery because they had no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – yet their university documents (Teacher Performance Assessments) were requiring this on final documents regarding practicums.

Alternatively, in other settings Indigenous practicum students were strongly encouraged to focus only on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content delivery so that their supervising practicum teacher could document this as their own achievements.”

(Submission 16)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and cultural responsiveness courses are not mandatory in all ITE programs across the country. In institutions that do offer or mandate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the base requirement is minimal across the whole ITE program and in the view of many, such courses were inadequate.

Stakeholders raised the generic nature of many ITE programs as an issue. There were serious concerns about how well ITE programs prepared beginning teachers to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, or to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives across all learning areas through ACARA’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority. Such concerns also extended to practicums and the knowledge and understanding of supervising teachers.

Although teacher education is not a key focus of this project, many stakeholders believe the mandating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Australian teacher education is fundamental to cultural responsiveness as it ensures all Australian students can be taught about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures by teachers who are themselves adequately educated. It is critical that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies are core areas of all course outlines and appropriate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives are incorporated in pre-service, postgraduate, and in-service teacher education programs.

The findings and recommendations in the recently released *Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* (Next Steps Report), provides several opportunities to improve ITE with respect to cultural competency.

- Recommendation 7 of the Next Steps Report calls out the need to better prepare teaching graduates with evidence-based practices, with particular attention to cultural responsiveness and working with families and carers.
- Recommendation 15 of the Next Steps Report calls for a strengthened link between performance and funding with the establishment of quality measures for ITE. These measures could and should include a specific focus on the quality of content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and culture.
- Recommendation 16 of the Next Steps Report calls for the development and use of mentor standards, to help lift the quality of supervised practicums, creating another opportunity for improved practice in this area.

Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the teaching workforce

A common concern that arose in all stages of the consultation process was that composition of the current teaching workforce does not reflect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learner. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are significantly underrepresented in schools, making up only 3% of the Australian teaching workforce. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, giving visibility to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers encourages positive role modelling and a sense of belonging in a predominantly non-Indigenous space. Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders is key in fostering student engagement, improving educational experiences and outcomes, and building the cultural responsiveness of the profession. There are, however, several challenges to overcome in addressing this issue.

Increasing the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers requires a deeper understanding of the barriers and limitations in the current system from ITE to teacher recruitment processes, induction, employment and retention in schools.

Written submissions noted challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pre-service and beginning teachers due to incongruences in the modes of communication, pedagogy and the value of family and community relationships in the classroom. This can often lead to pre-service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students dropping out of ITE.

The need for in-school mentoring to address this issue was acknowledged in multiple submissions. Such approaches would need to be locally supported by and through the community to avoid the unhelpful assumption of pan-Aboriginality or the assumption that just because someone is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, they can bring culture to all classrooms with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Misconceptions such as these ignore the diversity present in Indigenous communities and the social structures by which they operate.

Many submissions spoke to the need for increased inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in school leadership positions.

It was also discussed that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders are reluctant to identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people because they are concerned about being the only persuasive or credible voice speaking up for their culture. To counter this, it is important to have many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning support assistant, school administration officers, teachers, and school leaders so that staff members do not feel the cultural load and pressure to be the voice for all Indigenous perspectives and knowledges.

“The rate of practicum failure is one of the main reasons for [pre-service teachers] to abandon their degree, this is generally owing to the breakdown of communication. The mitigation of practicum failure rates is integral to improved long term outcomes – not only for the pre-service teacher but their family, local community and the education system in general.”

(Submission 68)

“Often, Aboriginal staff are only employed as ‘assistant teachers’ or otherwise but this limits their career development opportunities (and their position/representation within the school power dynamics) and doesn’t recognise the inherent ‘qualifications’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as teachers/educators.”

(NT Forum)

The findings and recommendations in the recently released Next Steps Report provides several opportunities to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the teaching workforce.

- Recommendation 2 of the Next Steps Report identifies the need to attract high quality candidates including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Recommendation 17 of the Next Steps Report calls for the development of a national approach to understanding teacher workforce supply and demand.

Staff turnover

High staff turnover, particularly in remote schools, presents significant challenges to improving the cultural responsiveness of the Australian teaching workforce and ultimately the cultural safety of the school system because “no amount of PD is effective if staff are continually changing”. (Submission 48). High staff turnover reduces trust between the school and community and limits the ability of both teachers and local communities to build relationships. Furthermore, high levels of staff turnover leave professional learning activities largely ineffective, as the ability to continuously build on the work of those who came before is lost. Unmanaged, staff turnover will remain one of the strongest impediments to sustainable change.

Sourcing quality resources and professional learning

The written submissions reiterated that educators feel they lack access to quality, authentic, and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources and/or, where resources are available, feel they often struggle to discern which are culturally appropriate, legitimate and sensitive. This has been identified as a considerable impediment to incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives, languages, histories and perspectives into classrooms. Teachers and school leaders require high quality and authentic resources that align to the curriculum to develop their own cultural responsiveness and ensure they are delivering culturally diverse and responsive content to their students. A solution identified by multiple submissions was creating a list of endorsed curriculum resources designed to support teachers to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, histories and cultures into teaching and learning programs in a respectful manner.

Accompanying guidelines for appropriately adopting and adapting these resources for inclusion in teaching/learning experiences in diverse classroom and community contexts would help improve their relevance and use by teachers, as would broader professional development opportunities pertaining to critical resource evaluation and contextualisation.

“...teachers felt they didn’t know where to go to get information and to be able to have access to a central hub would be advantageous.”

(Submission 79)

“Teachers should undertake annual or (at a minimum biennial) professional development studies in cultural competency, as they do for other areas of professional learning. Departments of Education have a fundamental responsibility to provide the professional development and the opportunity for teachers to attend.”

(Submission 67)

“If we ignore the learnings of successful programs from the recent past and allow valuable tools and resources to languish through lack of promotion or refreshment, we undermine generational transfer of knowledge in the profession and slow realisation of our goals for Indigenous education and achievement of cultural literacy in school communities.”

(Submission 12)

Similar concerns were noted about professional learning options. To develop cultural responsiveness, the written submissions highlighted that schools and education systems and sectors must invest sufficient funding to support evidence-based professional learning for all teaching staff. Anti-racism, cultural awareness, and racial literacy and tolerance were identified as essential topics for professional learning for the Australian teaching workforce. In addition to racial literacy is the need for professional development to support stronger critical literacy and media literacy. Submissions also highlighted the need for professional learning that promotes whole-school approaches to developing anti-racist practices and classroom teaching and learning strategies. They also emphasised the need for a change management framework to help schools foster positive perceptions of Indigenous attainment within the school community.

Numerous programs, both current and past, were described through the written submissions, indicating the vast range of professional learning resources that have been developed over time. Importantly, many of these resources have been evaluated and shown to have high impact within some contexts but not all. This was significant as a balance also needs to be struck between providing access to shared, consistent learning across the sector, as well as providing more contextualised, localised and individualised learning for specific school communities and individual teachers. Furthermore, it was emphasised that professional learning relating to the development of cultural responsiveness needed to be part of an ongoing (rather than once-off) component of a school's or region's professional learning program/schedule.

In combination, these observations suggest that the problem is less about availability and more about connecting resources to teachers when and where they need it.

While the desire for ‘endorsed’ resources was highlighted, there is also a question of alignment between the level of knowledge or cultural responsiveness of the teacher/school, their context (geography, student demographic) and the resource. This suggests the need for a cultural responsiveness capability framework that supports teachers and schools to orient themselves in their context with their school community, supporting a contextually relevant development pathway.

Consultation themes

The themes, issues, and challenges described below are drawn from all stages of the consultation process in response to the guiding questions contained in a discussion paper, as well as further discussion questions presented at the National Dialogue. Details on the approach to engaging with stakeholders to derive these findings can be found in the following section of this report.

Forty-three themes were derived from over 3,500 codes applied via NVivo coding of the consultation material. The following graph identifies the 10 main themes emerging from the consultation in order of the frequency with which they were raised. Each theme is described in more detail below.

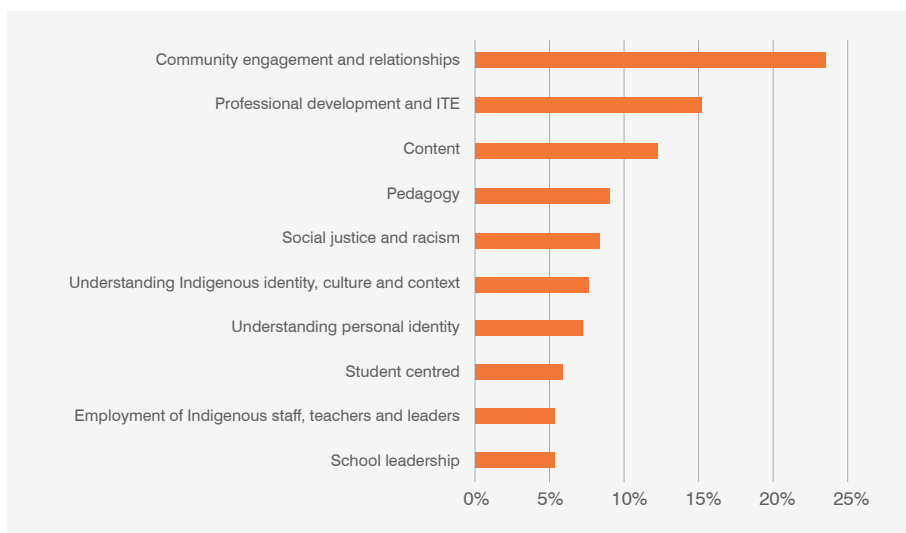


Figure 1: 10 Main themes from consultations

- **Community engagement and relationships:** refers to themes and ideas regarding relationship building between teachers and students, teachers and families, school and community, and the broader education system overall. Relationships are crucial to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a medium through which to know, understand and engage.
- **Professional development and ITE:** refers to concerns, issues, and opportunities related to the professional development of practicing teachers as well as processes and outcomes of initial teacher education with reference to the development of cultural responsiveness. This includes descriptions of where it is being done well and where services can be improved.
- **Content:** refers to descriptions of cultural responsiveness characterised as the presence of artifacts, such as flags, signs in the local language, or information about culture / history. These elements were often described in absence of any discussion of pedagogy.
- **Pedagogy:** refers to the use of culturally responsive pedagogies (both inside and outside the classroom), e.g.: yarning circles; involvement of families; practical hands-on activities. These practices were appropriate to all students but seen as distinct from the mainstream.

- **Social justice and racism:** refers to issues and themes relating to the presence of racism (both conscious and unconscious) in schools, policies and amongst some teachers. This also included the need to adopt anti-racism practices and issues of social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **Understanding Indigenous identity, culture, and context:** refers to themes related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemologies, culture, histories, traditions, ways of life, and areas of knowledge that non-Indigenous educators should be aware of and factor into their practice and student relationships.
- **Understanding personal identity:** relates to the observed need for educators to be more self-aware, not just of their assumptions but their own personal identity that exists in culture. To be aware that their identity and culture are bound together, and that they bring this identity into their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- **Student centred:** refers to the use of student-centred pedagogies and the need for educators to have a deep understanding of their students' learning needs, interests, and ways of learning. While this should apply to all students, it is fundamental to the development of culturally responsive teaching practice.
- **Employment of Indigenous staff, teachers, and leaders:** refers to the relatively low numbers of teachers, assistant teachers and school leaders from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds; the need to increase their numbers, and remove barriers to their success.
- **School leadership:** refers to the importance of, and role played by, school leadership in supporting culturally responsive and anti-racist policies and practices within their schools.

There were some differences in emphasis within submissions from education systems and sectors, schools, early childhood settings, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, universities, and unions and professional associations. For example, the emphasis on community engagement and relationships and professional development and ITE was common across most of the stakeholder groups but there was greater emphasis on social justice and racism in submissions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and from universities than from other groups.

Engaging with the profession

AITSL convened a range of online and face-to-face consultations, focus groups and workshops to understand the current thinking on cultural competency in the Australian education system. To capture the diversity of stakeholders that make up the teaching profession, extensive and targeted consultations were conducted in all states and territories and across the various education systems and sectors.

Consultations also included state and federal government agencies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education consultative groups, Indigenous education experts, and professional associations. Additionally, AITSL engaged with its Board, internal advisory groups, and expert standing committees.

Initial consultations

From August to December 2019, AITSL consulted with a range of stakeholders seeking feedback on the proposed approach for the project. To gauge the profession's current knowledge and understanding of cultural competency and its practice among the teaching workforce, as well as the barriers faced in undertaking this work, AITSL posed four guiding questions, these being:

To gauge the profession's current knowledge and understanding of cultural competency, its practice among the teaching workforce, and the barriers faced in undertaking this work; AITSL posed four guiding questions:

- 1. What does a culturally competent teaching workforce look like?**
- 2. What does a teacher/school leader need to be culturally competent? What will it take?**
- 3. What does cultural safety look like in schools?**
- 4. What might be some of the challenges or barriers we face in developing a culturally competent teaching workforce?**

Initial consultations indicated strong support for a collective effort to achieve more equitable educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by building a culturally competent teaching workforce. It was clear that generating national consistency and collaboration around cultural competency would allow common objectives to be met and measured, thereby achieving maximum impact.

Discussion paper

Informed by the initial consultations, in September 2020 AITSL released a discussion paper: *Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce* which was circulated to a broader range of stakeholders across the profession. It was also made available on the AITSL website, where it was downloaded over 5,000 times.

The discussion paper summarised the key issues identified through the initial consultations and research. Some issues, although outside the scope of this work, were included due to their crucial role in the development of a culturally competent teaching workforce.

From October 2020–February 2021, AITSL used the discussion paper as the basis for further consultation with stakeholders. Due to the restrictions presented by COVID-19, the consultations were conducted in two forms – online forums and written submissions.

Online forums

There were 12 online forums conducted involving education system and sector representatives in each state and territory as well as an Indigenous Education Experts Forum, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Forum, an Indigenous Education in Boarding Forum, and an Early Years Forum. These forums engaged over 400 stakeholders and deepened AITSL's understanding of the different perspectives held across the profession.

Some very robust discussions took place during the online forums and there was a sense that teachers and school leaders had been seeking an opportunity such as this to highlight some of the challenges they face in the education system. Participants of these forums were strong advocates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and were able to provide feedback on the barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in accessing equal and equitable education experiences.

Many teachers and school leaders believed that the lack of awareness and understanding of the learning needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the aspirations of families and communities was problematic. The prioritisation of system messages also presented challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in many regions and schools.

Written submissions

A total of 87 written submissions were received in response to the discussion paper. Overwhelmingly, the submissions shared many similarities with the findings from the initial consultations and online forums, whilst at the same time providing more detail on the causal relationships existing between the themes that were identified.

Submissions were received from 70 different stakeholder groups or organisations (including 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups) and 17 from individuals. AITSL would like to acknowledge the considerable effort required to develop submissions of such high calibre.

The Appendix lists the stakeholders who provided written submissions to the consultation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultations

Unfortunately, COVID-19 made consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities near impossible despite several attempts to conduct consultation face-to-face in the Torres Strait, Northern Territory and South Australia. Regardless, there was considerable engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, community members, Elders, and academics throughout the process, which AITSL's Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education deemed appropriate to inform the process including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences and perspectives.

National Dialogue

The National Dialogue was held in Canberra on 18–19 May 2021. The National Dialogue brought together over 120 participants, including a cross section of experts and stakeholders in Indigenous education, to discuss and provide high-level guidance through a series of three workshops. Each workshop explored a different issue, with all participants rotating across the workshop topics over the course of the event. The workshop topics were:

Workshop 1: Terminology

This workshop delved into issues associated with the terminology used when discussing the concept of cultural competence.

Workshop 2: Tools and Resources

This workshop explored the types of tools and resources AITSL could develop to support teachers to continue to build their cultural competence in their professional practice.

Workshop 3: Roadmap

This workshop discussed the characteristics of a future roadmap for the body of work emerging from the consultation both in terms of desired outcomes and issues of implementation.

Development of tools and resources

AITSL has collaborated with key stakeholders to progress the development work relating to the first 3 recommendations of this report. Following thorough analysis of the themes emerging from the review of the consultations, written submissions, online forums and national dialogue; three areas of development were identified in relation to supporting culturally responsive teaching and learning with professional learning resources:

- supporting increased self-awareness for teachers through critical self-reflection
- a common point of reference for terminology and standards of practice
- guidance on approaches to developing cultural responsiveness.

To support these areas of development, 3 tools were identified. These tools will support the development of culturally responsive practice in schools, with compatibility and consistency across the 3 tools in terms of theoretical foundations and terminology.

When implemented in conjunction with locally contextualised professional learning opportunities, these resources will be an opportunity to guide the development of greater culturally responsive practice in schools. Data gained from trialling and reporting on implementation of these resources across diverse educational settings could also build the evidence base around the impact of culturally responsive practices and yield insights to further address the needs of young Australians for culturally safe learning environments.

Self-reflection tool

The self-reflection tool is intended to support teacher's self-awareness of their own worldviews, assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and biases in relation to their learners and culture. Critical self-reflection was a consistent theme throughout the consultation, as a key mechanism to support increased self-awareness on the part of the teacher.

A self-reflection tool requires a set of reflective questions that engage the user in deep reflection on teachers' and school leaders' own beliefs and knowledge systems. The development of a cultural responsiveness reflection tool is necessary to support teachers to reflect on their own biases regarding culture and Indigenous students.

Direct experience tends to be the focus of reflection and there is vast diversity of contexts and therefore experiences across the education system. It may be that different versions of the tool are developed over time in response to feedback, to reflect variations in context and the types of experiences that are more likely to occur in those contexts. This will require testing in different circumstances to assess effectiveness.

Intercultural development continuum

The intercultural development continuum is intended to define a language to describe levels of competency including identifying characteristics, knowledges, skills, practice and moral imperatives against which teachers can assess and progress the development of cultural responsiveness.

The intercultural development continuum describes degrees of cultural responsiveness across different aspects of the education system (such as teachers, school leaderships, system administration) providing educators with a common point of reference in their efforts to increase cultural responsiveness.

The intent is for educators to use the self-reflection tool to conduct a self-assessment and use the results to situate themselves in the continuum and set goals and plan for meaningful growth. The continuum will describe a living and dynamic process and is not intended to be regarded as linear. The continuum will be required to support ongoing cycles of inquiry as educators move through different stages, contexts, times, and diverse groups. This will allow for continual growth.

This continuum also addresses numerous comments from contributors in relation to a desire for a central standard, definition or concept of cultural responsiveness.

Intercultural capability framework

An intercultural capability framework providing insight into the characteristics, impacts and practices that are associated with different levels of cultural responsiveness. The capability framework is compatible with the *Teaching Standards* with a set of actions, structures and forms of learning that enable teachers to be more culturally responsive in their classroom practice.

A factor that considerably complicates the development of cultural responsiveness in schools is the vast range of contexts in which teaching takes place; remote, and isolated Indigenous communities through to urban settings with no Indigenous students. Added to this is the diversity of Indigenous cultures to which practice needs to be responsive. Actions and approaches that are culturally responsive in one context will not be for another. As such, the focus needs to be on the factors that enable the individual to be sensitive to their context and the needs of students in that context.

Conclusion

AITSL was tasked to work with the profession to scope and develop resources that will build the capacity of the Australian teaching workforce and increase cultural safety in schools. Alongside this, AITSL has endeavoured to lay out a 'roadmap' that explores how teachers and school leaders will be able to access these products to best suit their existing knowledge and context. AITSL has partnered with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts and the profession to deliver this work and recognises that implementation will be most successful when progressed through continued partnership and with action taken across all levels of the education sector.

This report outlines a series of recommendations, underpinned by findings resulting from extensive consultation and research. The first 3 of these recommendations have been progressed as an element of this current project, with the development of an initial suite of tools and resources for teachers and school leaders. Additional support will be required to implement these effectively in diverse schooling contexts, and to respond to data that becomes available on the impact of greater cultural responsiveness in the teaching workforce.

The remaining recommendations constitute a call to action for areas consistently and strongly identified through the consultation process as needing improvement or reform. Through these recommendations, AITSL recognises the many complex factors impacting on the development of a culturally responsive teaching workforce that falls outside its current remit.

All these recommendations have resulted from the generous expertise, commitment and collaborative energy of stakeholders involved in the extensive national consultation process that commenced in 2019 and continued to the current time. Implementation of these recommendations will require continued collaboration and consultation with other organisations and bodies with associated responsibilities. This work is integral to a holistic and sustainable approach to cultural safety in Australian schools.

Appendix A

The following organisations and individuals provided written submissions to the consultation. It should be noted that some chose to remain anonymous. We thank everyone for their contributions.

Submissions

Aleryk Fricker, RMIT University, Vic	Catholic Education, Diocese of Cairns, Qld	Independent Schools Queensland, Qld
Amarylise Bessey, ACT	Catholic Education South Australia, SA	Indigenous Curriculum Taskforce, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Vic
Dr Amy Farndale, University of South Australia	Catholic Education Western Australia, WA	James Cook University, Qld
Anthony Lyon, Vic	Chairo Christian School, Pakenham, Vic	Assoc. Prof. James Davies and Emer. Prof. John Halsey, Flinders University, SA
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, Vic	Children's Ground Limited, NT	Jenny Riddell, Vic
Association of Independent Schools of NSW, NSW	College of Education, Psychology, and Social Work, Flinders University, SA	Jonna Vinje, NSW
Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, SA	Cultural Dimensions Network, SA	Kelly Carpenter, NSW
Australia Education Union, Vic	Dubbo South Public School, NSW	Kevin Smith
Australian Capital Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group, ACT	Diane Olejnik, WA	Melissa Linakis
Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate, ACT	Early Childhood Australia Inc., ACT	Macquarie School of Education, Macquarie University, NSW
Australian College of Educators, Vic	East Brisbane State School, Qld	Maryborough Special School, Qld
Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, NSW	Edmund Rice Australia, Vic	Meg Cinanni, WA
Australian Indigenous Lecturers in Teacher Education Association	Education Services Australia Limited, Vic	Melton Specialist School, Vic
Australian Library and Information Association, ACT	Emma Hodgkinson, Qld	Mount Lilydale Mercy College, Vic
Australian Professional Teachers Association, NSW	Farah Anderson, Qld	National Association of Australian Teachers of the Deaf, Vic
Black Cockatoo, Qld	G8 Education Limited, Qld	National Catholic Education Commission, NSW
Dr Bronwen Wade-Leeuwen, Macquarie University, NSW	Gayle Minniecon, Qld	National Indigenous Australians Agency, ACT
	Geelong College, Vic	National Museum of Australia, ACT
	Gowrie South Australia, SA	New South Wales Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group, NSW
	Independent Education Union of Australia – Queensland and Northern Territory Branch, Qld	

New South Wales Council of
Deans of Education, NSW

New South Wales Department of
Education, NSW

Nicole Simone, Queensland
University of Technology, Qld

Petrina Mercer, Qld

Port Augusta Secondary School,
SA

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Education Advisory
Group, Qld

Queensland Catholic Education
Commission, Qld

Queensland Curriculum and
Assessment Authority — Policy &
Resource Development, Qld

Reconciliation Australia, NSW

Dr Rick Gaffney, Qld

Shannon Grantley, Vic

Shooting Stars, WA

Stronger Smarter Institute, Qld

Sue Stewart

Tania Chamberlain, Qld

Tasmanian Department of
Education — Aboriginal
Education Services, Tas

Tasmanian Department of
Education — Quality Teaching
Team, Tas

Teaching Indigenous Perspectives
in the Australian Curriculum, NSW

Teri Robson, Qld

Dr Terrence Moore, University of
Tasmania, Tas

Tony Zhang, China

Western Australia Department of
Education, WA

Willyama High School, NSW

World Vision Australia, Vic

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Anti-racism	Actively opposing racism and promoting racial tolerance.
Cultural awareness	Recognising the differences and similarities between cultural groups.
Cultural competency	When organisations and individuals accept and respect cultural differences, continue self-assessment of cultural awareness, pay careful attention to the dynamics of cultural differences, and continually expand their cultural knowledge and resources in order to better meet the needs of minority populations (Cross et al. 1989).
Culturally responsive pedagogy	A framework that emphasises the need to acknowledge student differences within the context of a diverse classroom. By acknowledging these differences, teachers are asked to question what must be changed to cater and respond to student differences. A culturally responsive pedagogy requires teachers to be culturally competent, have high expectations while valuing students' home culture and language, and have critical consciousness (Gay, 2002).
Cultural responsiveness	Cultural responsiveness requires individuals to be culturally competent. This competency is having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. Culturally responsive teachers continuously support minoritised students through examination of their own assumptions about race and culture (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016).
Cultural safety	An environment that is spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for students; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are, and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge, and experience of learning together (Williams, 1999).
Race	A socio-political construct that is associated with physical attributes.
Racial literacy	Racial literacy, also known as racial consciousness, refers to an individual's deeper awareness and understanding of race.
Racism	When policies, practices, prejudices and discrimination result in the unqualified mistreatment of individuals or groups of individuals from a racial or ethnic group.
Reflective practices	The ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning and pay critical attention to the practical values and theories that inform everyday actions by examining practice reflectively and reflexively.





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