

Strategies for embedding Indigenous perspectives in curriculum and pedagogy

Seeking stories	Many teachers have been working on embedding Indigenous perspectives in their curriculum and pedagogical practices over the last 20 years. A great starting point is talking to other teachers and Indigenous education workers, and reading case studies of the various approaches taken. The EATSIPS website and the What Works ²⁶ program provide a good bank of teacher written case studies.
Focus on content and process	Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives should focus on both the content and the process used within the classroom. For this reason, teaching staff may begin the process while teaching curriculum content areas they are most familiar with. Each of the action areas, as they pertain to the classroom and curriculum context, will need to be continually revisited during teaching as teachers change schools and professional roles, and as student cohorts change, Indigenous engagement increases and teacher skills and confidence increases.
Educate yourself	Fundamental to introducing Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum is the recognition that there are two distinct Indigenous Australian cultures: those of Aboriginal peoples and those of Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, more than 260 Indigenous nations with more than 600 languages and dialects exist across Australia. Understanding this rich and diverse cultural heritage, multicultural perspectives and the impact of colonisation on Indigenous peoples will assist in EATSIPS and the curriculum. Talking to a wide variety of peoples, reading books and watching videos are all a great start. Commit to one new resource a week, and the task of new learning becomes manageable.
Value oral traditions	<p>Oral traditions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities exist in a number of interwoven forms. Oral traditions are the principal historical and day-to-day records of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and should be regarded as a significant part of Australian society. These oral traditions are seen as significant historical records informing written history, the arts and current cultural practices.</p> <p>Oral traditions include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • narratives, facts and spiritual beliefs that relate to the Ancestral Beings, creation times and the lore • family and clan relationships and responsibilities to the land, seas, waterways, the sky and the universe • rights and responsibilities around art forms including song, dance, music and visual arts in describing world views and relationships • scientific knowledge, including classification of environmental elements, seasonal patterns and conditions • stories of early contact with colonists • personal and community histories of lived experiences and events • biographical stories of individuals • kinship structures and community obligations. <p>Oral traditions substantiate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives about the past, present and future. They have been supported through various media such as rock and sand art, body painting, song and dance: and on artefacts including canoes, masks, message sticks and carvings. They are increasingly being expressed through the visual and performing arts, songs, multimedia such as computers, CDs, radio, film and TV, and literary expositions including prose, poetry, plays and other means of scriptwriting.</p>

Negotiate terminology	Consultation with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is essential when deciding on appropriate terminology to use within the school curriculum. It is equally important to consider the ways in which Indigenous peoples are represented through language in the classroom. Adjusting terminology used by the teacher and students within the classroom is critical, as it gives students a model for appropriate language and terminology to use when describing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and events. The original Draft P-12 Guidelines and framework for the teaching of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies in Queensland schools is a framework for critically analysing texts and a terminology list to guide teachers in the appropriate use and avoidance of terms. ²⁷ In addition, the Queensland Studies Authority has compiled an extensive terminology list through consultation with Indigenous education workers from across Queensland.
Challenge negative attitudes within the classroom	It is important to use pedagogical strategies to assist students both to reveal and change any negative attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes they may hold. Learning circles, small group responses, role-play and individual reflections are effective ways to share beliefs within a variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. This process should be undertaken initially in the context of a curriculum content area with which the classroom teacher is confident, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are invited to assist. Be mindful of the place of Indigenous students within the class in this context.
Showcase success	It is important to consider strategies for sharing the success of students with community and parents. This enables Indigenous peoples to check for appropriateness of knowledge and understanding, and enables dialogue to occur within the broader community around Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships and reconciliation processes.
Journal	Keeping a personal journal of the learning process enables individuals to reflect on where they have come from and where they are now. Honest personal reflection assists in purging personal emotions that are hard to articulate to others. Teachers involved in this process have articulated that personal journals enabled them to stay focused, to reflect honestly and to be open to change. Journals can also help to create the habits of mind in self-reflection needed for changing attitudes and perceptions created through a dominant paradigm. ²⁸
Focus groups	Joining or creating a focus group for professional and personal accountability assists school staff in sharing journeys at a personal level. This helps build relationships and extend individual learning through sharing of experiences and responses. Reconciliation groups can also assist.

Challenge	Challenge stereotypes and beliefs about Indigenous peoples. ²⁹ These may arise in conversations, staff rooms, in the media or in meetings. Seek to understand perspectives through learning to recognise racism, ignorance and unfounded attitudes. Challenge racist jokes and be willing to take responsibility for personal actions of the past.
Attend	Commit to attending EATSIPS workshops and courses. The Department of Education and Training's Crossing Cultures training is a good start.
Recognise	Recognise that Aboriginal peoples are distinctly different from Torres Strait Islander peoples, and that within these two groups there exists a complex mix of many language groups. Each group has its own individual belief system, language and dialect, lore and relationship to the land, seas and waterways.
Acknowledge	Acknowledge the impact government policies and dominant cultural perspectives have in shaping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and identities. Be aware that Indigenous peoples are different yet collectively linked through history and mistreatment.
Investigate	Investigate and seek to understand the impact of colonisation on Indigenous peoples.
Read and discuss	Study current theories on the intersection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural interface • Indigenous standpoint theory.
Long-term accountability	As a part of country service, many teachers and school leaders work within Indigenous communities and schools. The commitment to stay within the community is often limited by the departmental requirements for country service. When school leadership and teaching staff change continually, sustainable structures are harder to develop. A commitment to leaving a legacy of sustainable practice is part of the professional accountability process. Alternatively, departmental staff are asked to consider the needs of the community in relocating to a new job. Commitments of more than three years have shown a direct link to Indigenous student success and community engagement in the school.
Know your students	Seek to understand the perspectives of non-Indigenous students within the school and the historical relationships of these students and their families with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Colonisation involves colonisers and those colonised, and the repercussions of this need to be considered. Within a classroom context, it is particularly important to research the local history from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, to ensure that a sensitive and balanced representation of a local history is given.

²⁶ The What Works workbook and website is designed to help teachers understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and provides a great place to start: www.whatworks.edu.au/3_3.htm [accessed 13 May 2010]

²⁷ These draft documents (1995) can be found in LEC libraries.

²⁸ Dreise M 2004.

²⁹ A good place to start to challenge some generally held beliefs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: <http://www.acra.org.au/culture/rebutting-the-myths.html> [accessed 13 May 2010]