

SUBMISSION FORM

Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce

Thank you for choosing to make a submission. Please complete:

1. Submission details
2. Your response
3. Submit this document at: <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/indigenous-cultural-competency>
or email: indigenoussc@aitsl.edu.au

1. Submission details

Name	Adele Schmidt		
Email	aschmidt@ieuqnt.org.au		
Organisation	Independent Education Union of Australia – Queensland and Northern Territory Branch		
Address	346 Turbot Street, Spring Hill	State/Territory	Queensland
Mobile number	0419 161 223	Daytime number	07 3839 7020
Organisation Type <i>(if applicable, please mark)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Association <input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> University Other: <i>Education Union</i>		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Local <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> National <input type="checkbox"/> International		
Individual Type <i>(if applicable, please mark)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> School Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-service Teacher <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Other: <i>Research Officer</i>		
Do you or your organisation identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?	<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/> Torres Strait Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Both		
Please choose from the options <i>Please note that submissions will only be published on the AITSL website after the close date.</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Publish my submission online <input type="checkbox"/> Do not publish my submission online <input type="checkbox"/> Publish my submission online but keep my details anonymous		
Please ensure you have read the privacy policy and copyright statement			
Would you like to receive updates from AITSL on this project and other initiatives?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Have you read and understood the privacy statement?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Have you read and understood the copyright statement?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Signature			
Date			

2. Your response

Please keep your word count to less than 3,000 words.

Synopsis

Our union strongly supports the ongoing efforts of teachers to provide culturally appropriate learning opportunities for First Nations students, and a broader education for all students within a framework that is inclusive and respectful of First Nations histories, perspectives and cultures. It is however, important to note that no existing educational organisation possesses the necessary moral or cultural authority to endorse or recommend particular approaches, programs or resources. The most appropriate course of action is to support teachers and schools to implement a localised approach, through engagement of school staff with local Elders and other community members. In this context, we acknowledge that there is a shortage of teachers and support staff who can provide guidance in the development of the necessary community relationships. The best strategy for addressing this shortage is to provide support and resources that enable schools to recruit and train local First Nations community members to fill Teacher and School Officer positions.

1) What does a culturally competent teaching workforce (including teachers, school leaders and schools) look like?

Cultural competence is fundamental to quality education and is evidenced by strong, collaborative relationships between school staff and their local communities. Establishing those relationships requires significant investment of time and resources, particularly where local First Nations community members have real and valid reasons for distrusting educational institutions. It is only when First Nations communities are granted a degree of control over their relationship with schools and teachers that long-term change will be achieved.

It is also of fundamental importance that the dialogue around enhancing cultural competence of teachers does not descend into yet more rhetoric around the deficiencies of the profession, but rather focusses on what might be done to support and enable greater cultural competence. Theoretical approaches such as introduction of cultural competency units in initial teacher education, or development of professional development modules, will always have limited impact. While they can encourage an open-minded approach to teaching and learning, in many respects, the only viable way to develop genuine cultural competence is through meaningful engagement with community and culture. Having time to dedicate to the development of the necessary community relationships is essential if cultural competence is to be seen as a genuine priority for teachers and schools. To this end, government should be encouraged to commit to actions that will provide teachers and schools with realistic time and resources to invest in formation of strong, collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships with local First Nations communities.

In this context, it is also worth considering the role of school libraries as cultural hubs within schools, which can provide and promote First Nations stories, histories and cultures. With growing numbers of school libraries investing in First Nations resources that can be utilised by teachers and students, it is important that they are adequately funded and resourced.

2) What does a teacher/school leader need to be culturally competent? What will it take?

The best evidence of cultural competence is strong, collaborative relationships with the local community and development of those relationships is the most effective means of professional development. In that context, government and government (or other) agencies should be seeking to identify how they might support teachers and school leaders to develop those community relationships. This should not be approached as yet another task required of teachers, but should be supported through realistic allocation of time and resources, including where possible, the appointment of specialist staff with designated community liaison responsibilities, to ensure that local communities have a sense of control and agency in the development of their relationships with schools and teachers. It is also important that the work of community members in contributing to

development of teaching and learning programs and resources is assigned value, including, where appropriate, financial remuneration.

To illustrate what is possible when adequate funding and resources are provided, we include below a case study from a Catholic School in the Northern Territory.

Cultural Competency in Practice Case Study: Catholic School, Wadeye NT

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic College is located in the town of Wadeye, approximately 230km southwest of Darwin. With a population of approximately 2,300 people Wadeye is the largest Indigenous community in the Northern Territory. Although the Kardu Thithay Diminin people (the local First Nations inhabitants) speak numerous Indigenous languages, a large proportion speak Murrinhpatha and the local language program at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr offers Murrinhpatha instruction in two contexts:

Murrinhpatha Language maintenance: *Students in Transition, Year 1 and Year Two receive two hours of instruction in Murrinhpatha each day and students in years 3-6 receive three hours each week, utilising the Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures (NT: ILC) curriculum. Specifically, the school uses the **First Language Maintenance (L1M)** pathway and the **Cultural Knowledge and Content** curriculum. In the early years, monolingual Murrinhpatha instruction accounts for 50% of instruction (alongside a two-way L1 / L2 approach) before becoming a specialist subject area from year 3 onwards. In preschool and FAFT where possible the aim is to deliver all instruction in children's first language. Literacy is taught through strong Murrinhpatha language and the cultural content of Wadeye and the Thamarrurr Region via an approach built upon the understanding that "culture is at the heart of teaching Indigenous languages and cultures in the Northern Territory" (NT: ILC, p. iv). The aim of the program is to strengthen and develop children's Murrinhpatha language and that children become literate in Murrinhpatha first with an understanding that these skills can be transferred to the acquisition of English literacy. In-class instruction in the Murrinhpatha classrooms is provided by a fully qualified Murrinhpatha speaking, First Nations teachers working in collaboration with a Murrinhpatha-speaking Assistant Teacher. There are eight fully qualified Murrinhpatha teachers who qualified under the discontinued, but potentially soon to be reinstated, Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program.*

Bilingual / two-way teaching and learning: *other learning areas such as English, Maths, Science, HASS, Health and PE, and the Arts are (where possible) delivered through pedagogies of bilingual/two-way teaching and learning. Non-local English teachers and Murrinhpatha speaking assistant teachers work together in these classrooms as team teachers. This method ensures students have opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills through contextual and linguistically responsive ways. Assistant teachers undergo regular (1-2 hours per week) professional development, usually in the form of meetings with other teachers to go through topics being taught within the classroom. Several Assistant Teachers are currently studying different qualifications, including a Certificate II in Functional Literacy, Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.*

A key component of both programs is use of locally produced Murrinhpatha language resources developed by The Wadeye Literature Production Centre (LPC). The LPC produces a wide variety of educational resources made in Wadeye, including videos, ibooks and animations related to classroom learning. The LPC was established during the era of bilingual education (1973-2000) and is one of few LPCs that remain open. It is currently funded by the Catholic Education Office and, in addition to providing resources to the school and local community, also provides employment for local First Nations people.



3) What does cultural safety look like in schools?

Cultural safety is a fundamental concept in genuinely inclusive education. While it requires an acknowledgement that students come to the classroom with a range of histories, cultures and perspectives, it must extend beyond mere acknowledgment of cultural diversity and be reflected in both changes to the day to day activities of teachers and students and in levels of achievement of students from all cultural backgrounds. Teachers are highly trained professionals and routinely work consistently and persistently to ensure that all students feel safe and included in their classrooms, but many simply lack experience with First Nations cultures and communities. Initiatives such as the introduction of new or enhanced theoretical components of initial teacher education, or development of PD modules, are not a substitute for direct and meaningful engagement with local First Nations people and communities.

The vast majority of teachers would enthusiastically embrace opportunities to engage with their local communities, but their capacity to do so is impeded by other, competing demands of the profession. We would suggest that providing teachers and schools with time and resources that will enable their engagement with local communities is the only viable means of ensuring that First Nations students make a genuine connection with formal schooling and are able to make use of it as a pathway to full engagement with civil life.

4) What might be some of the challenges or barriers we face in developing a culturally competent teaching workforce?

As a union of ~17,000 teachers and support staff in non-government education institutions, and an organisation with an active Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), our union is receiving an increasing number of enquiries from education professionals seeking our union's endorsement of resources that have some First Nations component and are designed for use with students (both First Nations students and those from other cultural backgrounds) in schools. We also receive regular requests from teachers wanting to know whether we can refer them to suitable, high-quality programs or resources. Our response to such queries is to point out that our union does not possess the moral or cultural authority to endorse any particular program or resource and encourage members to engage with their local First Nations communities to develop localised responses to educational needs. Our contact with members does however, suggest that the presence of resources with varying authenticity and cultural authority is overwhelming and teachers are actively seeking some direction toward best practice. We believe that this direction is best facilitated by engagement with local First Nations Elders and communities and would therefore suggest that the single greatest barrier to development of a culturally competent teaching workforce is the capacity for teachers and school leaders to develop the necessary relationships.

An important support mechanism in development of those relationships is the realistic allocation of time and resources including, where possible, the appointment of specialist staff with designated community liaison responsibilities. This is important because, too often, individual First Nations teachers are unfairly expected to carry the entire cultural load for their school, without any reduction in their general teaching duties. With just 2% of teachers from a First Nations background[1], this is an unsustainable approach. If we are serious about increasing the cultural competency of schools, we must invest in the personnel and infrastructure required to support schools in developing meaningful, ongoing relationships with their local First Nations communities including, where appropriate, the appointment of local First Nations people to Teacher or School Officer roles.

We acknowledge that there are challenges in recruiting First Nations people to undertake the education and training required to take up such work in schools, but believe that a commitment to long-term initiatives and programmes such as RATEP, and , where necessary, the development of new and innovative industrial frameworks, it is possible to overcome these challenges. Our union is currently working with various stakeholder groups throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory to define industrial frameworks that might better support First Language Instruction and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this project further.



References

1. Australian_Council_of_Deans_of_Education. *ACDE ANALYSIS OF 2016 CENSUS STATISTICS OF ABORIGINAL TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER TEACHERS AND STUDENTS*. 2018 [cited 2020 1 October]; Available from: <https://www.acde.edu.au/acde-analysis-of-2016-census-statistics-of-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-teachers-and-students/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%202016%20census.of%20all%20special%20school%20teachers.>

