

Psychology education needs to reflect the lives of aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this resource may contain images, voices or names of people who have passed away.

To support aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage in psychology education in Australia, psychology curricula and teaching and learning programs should reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews and lived experiences. Students are more likely to study subjects in which their realities are reflected.

To encourage student participation and uptake of psychology, it's recommended that secondary and higher education providers include Indigenous knowledges (e.g. histories, cultures, contexts and paradigms of wellbeing) in their psychology curricula; in some cases, this is also a requirement of the accreditation body (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, 2020; Australian Psychology Accreditation Council, 2019). The benefits are that:

- it can support students studying psychology as a subject in secondary education to go on and study psychology in higher education; and
- it supports students studying psychology at the higher education level to develop culturally safe and responsive skills important for the workforce and beyond.



In the following audio (1 minute, 22 seconds) you'll hear Belle Selkirk, an Aboriginal Clinical Psychologist, talk about her experiences in psychology education ([download text transcript of audio](#)).

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Indigenous knowledges have equal epistemological value to Western knowledge systems in psychology education.

(DUDGEON ET AL., 2016)

The [Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project \(AIPEP\)](#) provides guidance on how to decolonise and Indigenise psychology education relevant to higher education while adding value in secondary education settings. In conjunction with the guidance provided by the AIPEP, the following commonly asked questions from education providers and subsequent recommendations represent a place to begin the important work of ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world views and lived experiences are appropriately embedded in psychology curricula.

Question 1: Our psychology education provider is eager to increase Indigenous knowledges in our curricula; where do we start with our decolonising journey?

The following recommendations will guide your education provider's process of engaging with and including Indigenous knowledges in curricula. These are not necessarily linear steps, but important principles and considerations to guide the journey.

Build relationships

Build relationships and partnerships with:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education centres and programs
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and scholars within universities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education departments and secondary school teachers; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led community organisations.

For long-term sustainability and reciprocity, it's important that these partnerships and knowledge-exchange initiatives are appropriately resourced and/or remunerated.

Collaborate

Engage collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and cultural advisors around a culturally safe and responsive long-term plan for your education provider. This is likely to be a coordinated and multifaceted plan that will require genuine collaboration to co-create and revise over time. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and cultural advisors are appropriately remunerated for their time and expertise. This is applicable to both secondary and higher education providers.

Promote cultural safety

- Consider cultural safety in your education provider and a long-term implementation plan to support the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra; 2023) defines cultural safety as:

Cultural safety is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities. Culturally safe practice is the ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practising behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism.

- Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultants and develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory committee. Ensure they are appropriately remunerated for their time and expertise.
- Develop a curriculum change plan or roadmap for embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. Think about the process of having materials approved and the communication of this process to staff. Consider the horizontal (across subjects/courses) and vertical integration (across year levels) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in your psychology curricula.
- Facilitate a range of learning opportunities for staff to build their capacity to teach and work in culturally safe and responsive ways.
- Hire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Consider:
 - the cultural safety of your education provider (is this an education setting where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff would feel welcome and culturally safe to work in?)
 - the recruitment, retention and career progression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
 - how the colonial load (sometimes known as cultural load) on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff will be managed; and
 - providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to give feedback regarding their experiences of cultural safety and level of support in place to manage colonial load.
- Develop a method for auditing and assessing the progression of your cultural safety implementation plan and your curricula change plan.

Interaction

Consider how individuals interact with the system. What are individual educators' processes (individual cultural safety and responsiveness learning journey, making unit changes) and education provider level processes? Ensure coherent learning across year levels. It is essential for education providers and individuals to work together.

Feedback

Provide opportunities for students to share lived experiences and provide feedback in a culturally safe way, such as a student reference group for input and feedback on course materials and level of support provided.

Equity pathways

If you are a higher education provider, consider how your provider will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students through entry pathways and progression through the course.

Consider:

- Development of pathway programs and criteria for entry to courses/programs; and
- Scholarships and bursaries for expenses associated with studying, for example: tuition fees, books and study materials, living expenses.

Participate

- Actively participate in relevant community and education groups, such as:
 - [AIPEP Community of Practice](#) for higher education providers
 - [Australian Psychological Society Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Psychology \(APS ATSIPP\) interest group](#) (for APS members)
 - [Australian Psychological Society Division of Psychological Research, Education and Training \(APS DPRET\) group](#) (for APS members); and
 - state and territory subject associations and teacher networks.
- Contribute to community and psychology education groups and engage in learning opportunities.
- Participate in state and territory curriculum development and consultation processes.
- Learn from other secondary and higher education providers' decolonising journey.
- Share your experiences and successes, welcome feedback and peer support.

Question 2: I am a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person and teaching Indigenous perspectives in psychology as part of my curricula...

a) Where do I start?

As educators teaching the psychology curriculum, you will likely be on your own cultural safety and responsiveness learning journey, while at the same time teaching Indigenous perspectives in psychology to your students. That's OK – we are all on a continuous learning journey.

Some suggestions to support your learning journey include:

- Create your own cultural safety and responsiveness learning plan and participate in professional learning. This may also be part of your Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and/or performance development plan.
- Highlight your strengths and areas for improvements.
- Look at the [AIPEP website](#) for resources you might want to incorporate in your learnings.
- Think about the types of training that might support your learning.
- Honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, experiences and knowledge systems in your learnings and teachings. This is about honouring the epistemological value of Indigenous knowledges equally with that of Western knowledge systems.
- Build relationships and partnerships with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), Elders, cultural mentors, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues.
- Take a collaborative approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families, and communities.
- Learn about the Sovereign Custodians of the lands you are on and their rich and diverse histories, traditions, cultures, and language groups.
- Learn about Australia's history of colonisation and ongoing racism. Understanding the human rights and social justice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is foundational knowledge.
- Engage in learning around the importance and differences of a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country. Learn how to give an Acknowledgment of Country and incorporate this in the beginning of your lectures and classes.
- Engage in activities and opportunities around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural learning offered by your education provider and in your community, such as workshops, presentations, yarninFg circles, on-Country group activities, videos, lectures, etc.
- Seek out cultural safety training and cultural mentoring. It's important that your education provider offers support and opportunities for this vital learning, however you may have to look beyond to meet your own individual learning needs.

- Connect with other educators within your education provider and community who have begun their cultural safety and responsiveness learning journey. Reflect on:
 - what their journeys looked like
 - what the challenges and enablers to embedding curriculum changes were; and
 - what some of their assumptions and biases that have changed over time were.
- Educate yourself on models of Indigenous psychology (e.g. social and emotional wellbeing) and practice conceptualising, understanding and teaching from a holistic, multidimensional perspective.
- Be flexible in your approach to learning and seeking knowledge. Indigenous knowledges can be found in a vast array of sources such as community reports, videos, practice-based examples, and grey literature.
- Be willing to look inwards. Be curious about your own cultural standpoint, positionality, and biases. Self-reflexivity is essential to cultural safety and responsiveness.
- Be willing to address power differentials and racism in yourself and your environment, including your education provider.
- Recognise that cultural safety, responsiveness and decolonising psychology are all part of a long-term learning journey, that requires ongoing self-reflexivity, education and practice. It's important that we each make a personal commitment to this learning journey, and it's equally important that systems such as education providers deliver the necessary support.



b) What knowledge and frameworks should I include?

In the following audio clip (2 minutes, 26 seconds) Professor Pat Dudgeon AM talks about different frameworks that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families ([download text transcript of audio](#)).

Helpful frameworks and resources

- [Decolonising mental health when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families](#) (Emerging Minds and Mental Health Professionals' Network webinar)
- Decolonising psychology – [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) (Emerging Minds podcast episodes)
- [A history of Indigenous psychology](#) – Chapter 3, Part 1 of *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing](#) – Chapter 4, Part 1 of *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*
- Holistic wellbeing resources such as the [Dance of Life](#) and [Social and emotional wellbeing fact sheets](#) from Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (TIMHWB)
- For a human rights approach to health and wellbeing start with the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Colonial trauma and racism resources](#) (both historical and contemporary) on the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project
- Principles of cultural safety and responsiveness can be found in [Ahpra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health strategy](#)
- Ethical research principles and guidelines including:
 - AIATSIS's [Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#)
 - NHMRC's [Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities](#); and
 - an [Aboriginal participatory action research methodology](#) from the Lowitja Institute

- Healing and pathways to recovery in [Cultural safety in trauma-informed practice from a First Nations perspective: Billabongs of knowledge](#)
- [Indigenous governance and self-determination rights information](#) from the Australian Human Rights Commission
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in secondary education resources including [Aboriginal Perspectives F-10 past professional learning webinars](#) and [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the VCE](#)
- [Guidance in creating Honours \(Fourth Year\) and Postgraduate equity pathways in tertiary Psychology for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants](#)
- In [Positive partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations](#) TIMHWP contributors, Zaccariah Cox and Dr Emma Carlin discuss the transformative potential of authentic partnerships and cultural humility.

These resources are just a starting point. We encourage you to self-educate through reputable, Indigenous-led websites and resources:

- [Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project \(AIPEP\)](#)
- [Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association \(AIPA\)](#)
- [Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention \(CBPATSISP\)](#)
- [Healing Foundation](#)
- [Gayaa Dhuwi \(Proud Spirit\) Australia](#)
- [Lowitja Institute](#)
- [WellMob](#)
- [Australian Indigenous Health/InfoNet](#); and
- relevant secondary and higher education specific education resources, such as [VCE Psychology](#) and [Koori Curriculum](#).

Decolonising your psychology curriculum is a multifaceted process; it involves self-directed learning, relationship building, consultations, cyclical learning within your course or program and engagement at the education provider level. Education systems and individual educators are both equally responsible for the decolonising journey and must work together for these changes to be long lasting and impactful. Understandably, this will take time and there might be challenges along the way. However, there will be many rewarding experiences that can ultimately support and inspire the next generation of bright and deadly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists. We invite you and your education provider to be a part of this positive and important journey in your students' lives.

About the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) and supporting resources

- [AIPEP frameworks](#)
- [AIPEP Empowering the workforce factsheet](#)
- [AIPEP website](#)
- [The Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association \(AIPA\) website](#)

References

Ahpra. (2020). [National scheme's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety strategy 2020–2025](#). Melbourne: Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

Ahpra. (2023). [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health strategy](#) (Web page). Melbourne: Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

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Dudgeon, P., Darlaston-Jones, D., Phillips, G., Newnham, K., Brideson, T., Cranney, J. ... Page, S. (2016). [Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project \(AIPEP\): Curriculum Framework](#). Perth: University of Western Australia.



Thank you for being an ally and supporting the next generation of strong, deadly and self-determined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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