# AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES

## Guiding principles for promoting and implementing the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority

## Introduction

ACARA acknowledges the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Australians. This includes the special relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have with land, sea, sky and waterways, their unique history and cultural diversity, and their ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.

The Australian Curriculum: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority provides the opportunity for all students to engage with this important aspect of Australia's nationhood.

## Purpose

A set of principles is provided to support schools as they implement the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority to achieve better learning outcomes for all students. The principles will help teachers to understand, respect and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world views and encourage culturally responsive practices in every school community.

These principles support schools to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures priority in ways that are appropriate to the community or context.

# About the Australian Curriculum: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority[1]

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures priority uses a conceptual framework to provide a context for learning. The framework is based on the underpinning belief in the centrality of Identities and Communities and the three key concepts of Country/Place, Culture and People. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identities are represented as pivotal to the priority and are approached through knowledge and understanding of the interconnected concepts of Country/Place, Culture and People. Each of these three concepts is further developed through the nine organising ideas that are connected to curriculum learning area content through which all educators can deepen their understanding of the priority. Connections should be made to the learning areas and to the general capabilities; this applies particularly to personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding.

| Code | Organising ideas |
|------|------------------|
| **Country/Place** | |
| OI.1 | Australia has two distinct Indigenous groups: Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and within those groups there is significant diversity. |
| OI.2 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place. |
| OI.3 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways |
| **Culture** | |
| OI.4 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups. |
| OI.5 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. |
| OI.6 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples live in Australia as first peoples of Country or Place and demonstrate resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation. |
| **People** | |
| OI.7 | The broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies encompass a diversity of nations across Australia. |
| OI.8 | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' family and kinship structures are strong and sophisticated. |
| OI.9 | The significant contributions of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the present and past are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally. |

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[1] For more information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority and its organising ideas, go to: http://australiancurriculum.edu.au

# Twelve guiding principles

The following twelve guiding principles are organised to reflect the three key concepts of Country/Place, Culture and People described above. Teachers are encouraged to discuss them to deepen their understanding of the nine organising ideas of the priority.

## About Country/Place

### Acknowledgement of Country

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is a demonstration of respect for, and appreciation of, the local First Australians; this acknowledgement can be carried out by non-Indigenous people. It can occur at the beginning of all significant events, such as conferences, meetings and celebrations, by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which people meet.

A 'Welcome to Country' is performed by a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, usually a recognised Elder from the community, on whose traditional land the event is being held.

### Sharing knowledge about sacred and significant sites and ceremonies

Consultation with a school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator, community Elders and/or local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in authority is advisable to identify any sacred, significant or sensitive knowledge or information in the local area. If this is not possible, it is wise to seek advice from regional or state-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education teams.

### Using images of Country

This is a moral or ethical issue rather than a legal matter, and it is advisable to contact the local or state-based land council. Land councils can usually determine which places are sacred and should not be photographed.

## About Culture

### Local protocols

Many local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have protocols that they have developed through their various organisations or groups. These groups can guide and support teachers and schools in deciding what is relevant and appropriate for their context. The communities are very keen to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, knowledge and cultures represented in the Australian Curriculum and should be encouraged to provide feedback to ACARA as appropriate and possible. These organisations or groups will be a valuable resource in providing advice about local protocols.

### Local language

Teachers should be aware of the local language(s). Information can generally be obtained by:
- talking to the school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator
- referring to the local community education consultative group
- seeking advice from a community leader or regional or state-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education team.

There are three elements of language to consider:

- the local language(s)
- Aboriginal English, which refers to the normal, everyday or home talk that Aboriginal people use with each other. It is a dialect of English that has developed, and continues to develop, over time as Aboriginal people and Europeans have interacted. It has its own grammatical rules, sounds, words and meanings which show evidence of Aboriginal languages
- Kriol, which is a northern Australian creole language that is used among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people who speak different parent languages. It is a language in its own right with its own sound system, distinct syntactic structure, grammatical rules, lexicon and norms of speech. There are several dialects in use.[2]

When considering how to incorporate the local language(s), schools can:

- refer to the Australian Curriculum Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Framework for ideas (for example,  signs around the school with greetings)
- teach the language to students
- encourage teachers to learn the language.

## Terminology

The use of acceptable terminology varies across the states and territories. It is wise to seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators or community leaders to ensure that correct local terminology is used throughout the school. In general, the following guidelines apply:

- 'Aboriginal people' is the preferred terminology. 'Aborigine' is an outdated term and can cause offence with Aboriginal people
- 'Aboriginal' is always capitalised when referring to the original inhabitants of Australia. The word 'Indigenous' is always capitalised when referring to the original inhabitants of Australia, noting that the word 'Indigenous' is not necessarily accepted in some states and territories
- 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' is the title when referring to the entire population. Other acceptable terms are:
  - o 'Aboriginal Peoples' or 'Torres Strait Islander Peoples' when referring to the entirety of either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities
  - o 'Aboriginal person/people' and 'Torres Strait Islander people' when referring to one or several members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- 'Aboriginal' is used as an adjective (e.g. 'Aboriginal person') and 'Torres Strait Islander' as an adjective group (e.g., 'Torres Strait Islander student')
- Country/Place is used to refer to the place of origin for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Aboriginal Peoples refer to it as 'Country', whereas Torres Strait Islander Peoples refer to it as 'Place'. Both words start with upper case letters
- The acronym 'ATSI' can be offensive and should not be used when referring to a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin
- the terms 'First Peoples' and 'First Nations' can be used in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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[2] For further information about Kriol, go to: http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/curriculum/first-language-learner-pathway/f-10?layout=1

### Cultural identity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students identify culturally in different ways. Ideally, schools will be continually developing and supporting the cultural identity of their students. It is important to recognise that individuals are at different stages of their cultural journey, to be aware of this, and to respect their choices. For further information about cultural identity, go to: http://rrr.edu.au/unit/module-1/topic-2/identity/.

### Development and use of resources

Any resources that a school develops, procures or uses for implementing the Australian Curriculum: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority must be checked for cultural appropriateness and integrity. It is wise to discuss this with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator and members of the local community. If a school does not have a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the school authority may have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education team or it may be possible to approach the state-based Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB).

### Flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

Flying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags demonstrates recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture and promotes a sense of partnership, reconciliation and commitment to closing the gap. The Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag are both official flags of Australia and were recognised under Federal legislation in July 1995[3].

## About People

### Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to teach or support school staff

Many schools employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to support teachers as they teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. It is recommended that schools speak to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator or approach local community organisations for advice about suitably qualified people and appropriate recruitment strategies.

### Community members coming into the school

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be an important resource, and many schools encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, families, Elders and community people to engage with the school community. It is important to respect and honour Elders as they are valued members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the wider community.

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can occur in many ways, including:

- listening and giving people time to think and speak
- discussing independent learning plans
- consulting about resources for teaching the Australian Curriculum: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority
- hosting community events in the school.

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[3] Further information about flying the flag can be found on the Australian Government's website: https://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/otherflag.cfm

The school – community relationships

It is important that schools recognise the importance of two-way relationships when building partnerships with the community. This means that learning and communicating occurs 'both ways' between the school and the community. This can be achieved by:

- inviting parents and community members to observe or participate in lesson held outside the school
- teachers accompanying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators or liaison officers on home visits
- teachers attending sports games, (for example football or netball) and supporting students from the sidelines
- teachers attending community meetings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators or liaison officers
- the school conducting a negotiated event in the community, (for example, an information night with refreshments provided

## Development of cultural responsiveness of teachers and other staff

It is strongly recommended that schools engage in ongoing professional learning for teachers. Teachers who have knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and are responsive to these will be better equipped to improve the learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

There are many avenues for sourcing professional learning, including:

- ACARA's Australian Curriculum Specialist: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education[4]
- Stronger Smarter Institute[5]
- What Works. The Work Program[6]
- Reconciliation Australia[7]
- Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation[8]
- State-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education teams and consultative groups.

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[4] ACARA's Australian Curriculum Specialist: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education can be contacted to support schools: http://www.acara.edu.au/contact-us

[5] The Stronger Smarter Institute works with communities and schools across Australia so people are strong in culture, strong in identity and are able to enjoy prosperous, safe and healthy lives: http://strongersmarter.com.au

[6] What Works. The Work Program helps schools plan and take action to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The website provides supporting materials: http://www.whatworks.edu.au

[7] Reconciliation Australia resource *Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning:* http://www.reconciliation.org.au/schools

[8] Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation[8] provides resources to support teacher educators delivering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education units in teacher education programs: http://rrr.edu.au

**Some general links to protocols from state-based Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and education systems**

National
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. *Ethical protocols for working with Indigenous Australians:* http://aiatsis.gov.au/publications/products/subject-guide-ethical-protocols-working-indigenous-australians
- Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation. Cultural protocols: http://rrr.edu.au/protocols
- More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative. Related resources can be found on website: http://matsiti.edu.au

New South Wales
- Board of Studies 2008. *Working with Aboriginal communities: A guide to community consultation and protocols*: http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/files/working-with-aboriginal-communities.pdf

Northern Territory
- Catholic Education Northern Territory Diocese of Darwin. Indigenous Catholic Community Schools 2015: http://www.ceont.catholic.edu.au/__files/f/3780/ICCS%20HANDBOOK%202018.pdf

Queensland
- Department of Education and Training. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge framework: http://indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/eatsips/classroom-ethos/Pages/indigenous-knowledge-framework.aspx

South Australia
- HASS SA resources to support ATSIHC: http://hass-sa.asn.au/resources/overview

Tasmania
- Tasmanian Government. Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country: http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/executive/protocol_office/acknowledgements_and_welcome_to_country

Victoria
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. 2015. Protocols for Koorie education in Victorian primary and secondary schools: http://www.vaeai.org.au/_uploads/_ckpg/files/ProtocolsDocVAEAI18jan17final.pdf

- Department of Education and Training, *Koorie cross-curricular protocols for Victorian government schools*: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/koorieart.aspx

Western Australia
- Department of Education. Protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Traditional Ownership: http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/guidelines/welcome-to-country-and-acknowledgement-of-country-protocols.en