

Building Capacity Through Partnerships: Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and perspectives at the School, College and University levels

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Strategic objectives addressed:

- Designing or redesigning sustainable programs for onshore and offshore delivery, including flexible delivery
- Implementing AQF and TEQSA requirements
- Redesigning curricula around new learning spaces
- Promoting and supporting Indigenous participation in tertiary education.

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1 Executive summary

The implementation of the new Bachelor of Education in 2014 created the opportunity for significant change and staff development within the School of Education (SoE). New Australian Curriculum content requires that students gain an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives. This project arose to fill the need for enhanced staff capability to implement the new curriculum effectively and so to meet the AQF, TEQSA and AITSL accreditation requirements.

The project's purpose was to address SoE staff capabilities by developing a sustainable professional learning program. It was designed and carried out in partnership with RMIT's Ngarara Willim Centre (NWC), Indigenous Specialisation (IS) and the Learning and Teaching Unit (LTU) staff at RMIT. The partnership model and professional learning approaches also inform and provide a model for similar work in program areas across the University.

Beginning with mapping the accreditation expectations for Bachelor of Education courses, and an investigation of existing staff capabilities in the area, the project team identified the professional learning needs of SoE staff. It was found that while most staff are already making an effort to include Indigenous perspectives and knowledges in their courses, many lacked significant knowledge and confidence to teach in the area. These findings shaped the team's approach for sustainable professional learning in the School during the second half of the project, and a strategy was formed to share the project outcomes with a broader RMIT audience.

This project has revealed a great deal about staff knowledge around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives. It has adapted its approach in light of these findings in order to provide the School of Education and the broader RMIT community with the best possible sustainable professional learning tools. The work of raising staff knowledge and capability is ongoing.

2 Outcomes

The project has several key outcomes. Most importantly, for the first time there is evidence regarding levels of staff awareness (at least in the School of Education) around Indigenous perspectives within teaching practice. Knowing how staff are placed in relation to these issues is necessary for designing the most appropriate professional learning program for the short and medium term.

In the short term, as planned in the LTIF proposal, the 2014 SoE Professional Learning Day included a presentation and workshop delivered by an Indigenous educator. Further follow-up development activities are planned for 2015. Beyond the School, presentations will also be made at events such as the Learning and Teaching Expo.

For the medium to long term, the project team has developed a Google Site that functions as an interactive resource for RMIT staff and students. The site, which will be promoted across the University, includes key information on Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives, and on integrating these into teaching practice. The site also has space for discussion and will be moderated by experts on an ongoing basis.

The team has also recommended the establishment of an Indigenous Advisory Board for the School of Education.

All students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education Primary will benefit from this project through an enriched curriculum, which by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives into teacher education programs, now meets the new AITSL standards 1.4 and 2.4, as well as the Australian Curriculum requirements.

Staff involved in the delivery of the Bachelor of Education Primary will also benefit from opportunities to support new knowledge, skills and cultural competencies required to teach Indigenous perspectives and to identify the potential needs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Scholarly output is included in the attached publications plan.

In summary, the project achieved the following outcomes:

1. Existing knowledge assessed
2. Professional learning needs identified
3. Sustainable professional learning practice and resources developed
4. These programs and resources extended beyond SoE to be utilised RMIT- wide.

3 Project outcomes and impacts

3.1 Outcomes of project objectives

This curriculum enhancement project had three primary objectives: staff capability, sustainable learning practices, and extending the reach.

3.1.1 Staff capability

Enhance School of Education staff capability to effectively implement AQF, TEQSA, AITSL and VIT accreditation requirements for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational histories, cultures and perspectives in the revised Bachelor of Education to begin in 2014.

The initial outcome of this project was the data collected in the early stages. In Phase 1, the project team mapped AITSL and ACARA standards to identify requisite capabilities of graduating teacher education students. Existing Bachelor of Education Primary courses were mapped to identify gaps and potential for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives. The team also conducted a literature review to identify models of good practice.

Following interviews and focus groups with SoE staff, a needs analysis was conducted to identify gaps in staff knowledge and cultural competence around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives. We aimed to learn:

- the level of staff knowledge about the AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4 and Australian Curriculum Cross-Curriculum Priorities (CCP)
- the challenges staff anticipated for themselves and their students in implementing the Standards and CCP
- staff's preferred methods of receiving professional learning in order to embed the Standards and CCP in their courses.

Our findings from this research were as follows.

- Most staff are already making an effort to include Indigenous perspectives and knowledges in their courses.
- Many staff, however, do not have extensive knowledge of Indigenous perspectives or histories, and they lack confidence to extend their knowledges and skills.
- A preference was expressed for a 'quick fix' or 'tips and tricks' approach to professional learning on this subject. This preference is indicative of staff's stated time constraints, as well as a lack of awareness about the relevance of Indigenous perspectives to their own professional practice.

- The lack of experience and knowledge of the subject matter was a cause for anxiety amongst staff. The project team sees these staff members as needing encouragement to take individual responsibility for addressing this; the project's Google Site will assist them.
- As many SoE staff are teaching discipline specialists rather than educational sociologists, the project team perceives the need to provide professional learning about 'thinking sociologically', as this is necessary to engage with the task of implementing the AITSL standards and Australian Curriculum in this area. At this stage, we have decided that the Google Site and workshops will be the most effective way of leading into this. That is, once staff gain confidence and skills, we can assist them to move their thinking to higher levels of cultural competence.

The published information from AITSL and VIT is extensive and was assessed by the project team as being sufficient for the purposes of this project; it was not necessary to engage directly with key academics outside the SoE, agencies and policy bodies. This is due to the early stage at which the SoE has been found to be with respect to embedding Indigenous perspectives and engaging more broadly with these issues.

In consultation with Indigenous project partners, the project team determined that it was not appropriate to seek the advice of external Indigenous stakeholders. The project's findings indicate that a permanent Indigenous Advisory Group should be convened for the School of Education.

Staff capability was targeted at the SoE Annual Staff Learning Day in September, which included a keynote presentation and a workshop from and about the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, knowledge and cultures in our teaching. This program reached staff across HE and VE sectors within the School.

A full-day Professional Learning Day is programmed to take place in Semester 1, 2015 for all SoE staff. The day will be divided into theoretical and practical modules and will address the gaps in knowledge identified in the interviews and focus groups. While this workshop was originally intended for 2014, the project team determined, as a result of the needs analysis, that 2015 would be more timely in terms of staff readiness. The 2014 Staff Learning Day activities have now set the scene for the 2015 follow-up workshop, as well as the Google Site.

3.1.2 Sustainable learning practices for staff

Develop sustainable professional learning practices for staff, in partnership with Indigenous colleagues, in order to enrich the student learning experience in this area.

The project team identified and developed approaches for professional development of University staff in this area. In the first instance this involved working with SoE staff to renew curriculum, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives are embedded into Bachelor of Education Primary courses.

The central outcome in sustainable learning practices is the 'Embedding Perspectives' Google Site developed as part of this project. The site, which is due to be launched soon, will be available for use by all RMIT staff and students. The site provides:

- links to teaching resources for staff and students
- links to scholarly research
- links to policy and practice guidelines
- a forum promoting ongoing dialogue in the virtual space
- information on basic protocols.

3.1.3 Extend the reach

Take the perspectives and approaches to learning and teaching developed for the B Ed program and use/adapt them for the professional development of staff at Program, School, College and University levels.

The team identified and developed approaches for the professional development of University staff, and worked to develop and share learning from the project at the School, College and University levels.

The project has increased awareness amongst School of Education staff of the complexities and importance of integrating the AITSL and ACARA standards. Proposed strategies to support staff to meet those standards have been documented, and awareness of and support for the project has already reached beyond the School of Education.

It is our intention that the project's impact will continue to grow as professional learning sessions in this area become more frequent, both in the School of Education and across the University. Project partners will also develop and share resources and learning from the project at School, College and University levels.

To further extend the reach of the project at RMIT, the project team will present at the 2015 Learning and Teaching Expo. The presentation will focus on staff learning and engagement with aspects of Indigenous knowledges, cultures and perspectives.

3.2 Linkages

This project is inherently interdisciplinary and has prompted a significant level of collaboration beyond the project team. We have worked closely as a team with our project partners:

- School of Education (Rachel Patrick and Emily Gray)
- Indigenous Specialisation (Nikki Moodie)
- the Ngarara Willim Centre (Kevin Moore and Matthew Starr)
- Learning and Teaching (Milton Nomikoudis).

3.3 Issues

One key issue that altered the course of the project came at the end of Phase 2 and arose from the needs analysis we conducted in response to our research. It became apparent that:

- Staff knowledge and capacity on the issues at hand was at a very elementary level
- The timeframe to achieve the stated project goals was too short.

Given the nature of teaching and the iterative improvement of courses over many years, the timeframe issue is to some extent inevitable. A longitudinal evaluation of impacts would be a useful future project and clearly is not possible in a one-year period.

This issue led to a number of adaptations.

We reassessed the original aim of working with external stakeholders. Our assessment was that SoE staff are not ready for external engagement at this point, and changed our emphasis to developing the Google Site and the 2015 Professional Learning Day.

Another original aim was to develop an evaluation tool with which to measure the impact of professional learning on staff knowledge and cultural competence. Given our discoveries in Phases 1 and 2 about the lack of cultural awareness and disciplinary engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, we decided that a new strategy was advisable. The culturally appropriate response to support the ongoing professional learning and development of staff knowledge and cultural competence is to establish an Indigenous Advisory Group, in addition to the Google Site and Professional Learning Day; this is a more cost-effective and relevant action than creating an evaluation tool.

3.4 Recommendations

The project team has the following recommendations.

- The creation of an Indigenous Advisory Group for SoE, with a view to potentially expanding beyond the School. This body would advise on issues such as protocols, curriculum links, curriculum development, etc, and would have input into all aspects of the School's work in this area (AITSL standards 1.4 and 2.4, and the Australian School Curriculum). The Google Site, once set up, is maintained and monitored for RMIT staff and students.
- A Professional Learning Day for key staff in 2015.
- That Welcome to Country becomes part of SoE Orientation Week and other significant events.
- That this model is included in other Schools and programs across the University.

4 Dissemination strategies and outputs

The project outcomes will continue to be disseminated widely according to the methods in the following OLT/ALTC guidelines.

4.1 Information provision

4.1.1 'Embedding Perspectives' Google Site

The Google Site is an essential deliverable from this project. It provides a central 'hub' of information about Indigenous perspectives and the process of embedding them within the curriculum and into teaching practice itself.

The Google Site is designed to be an interactive resource for staff to learn their obligations as well as to access information that may not be available elsewhere. The content will be approachable and will include lighter material alongside more information-dense academic content. The material will be tailored for use at RMIT and will be sustainable and applicable across the University. It will feature an interactive forum where staff and students are invited to ask questions and discuss issues around Indigenous perspectives.

The project team is currently in negotiation with Indigenous Specialisation around securing the ongoing administration and ownership of the Google Site. We aim to have it kept in a central location and administered by those with relevant expertise in Indigenous studies and research.

The Google Site will be promoted internally through channels such as RMIT Update and various School and College newsletters.

Once launched, the site will be available to all RMIT staff and students at <https://sites.google.com/a/rmit.edu.au/embeddingperspectives/>

4.1.2 Scholarly output

See the attached publications plan for details on the academic dissemination of the project's outcomes.

4.1.3 Indigenous Advisory Group

This group will advise on protocols, curriculum links and so on. Its input into all aspects of the School's work in the area of Indigenous perspectives will disseminate the learnings and research outcomes of the project.

4.1.4 Professional learning

The Indigenous content at the September 2014 Professional Learning Day was very well received by SoE staff. We are confident that the full-day session to be held in Semester 1, 2015 will build on that progress and prove to be a highly effective dissemination tool, as well as setting staff up with the confidence and skill to enhance their courses in this area.

4.1.5 2015 Learning and Teaching Expo

With a view to extending project outcomes beyond the School, the presentation at the L&T Expo will assist staff to learn and engage with Indigenous perspectives, knowledges and cultures.

4.2 Engaged

- Ongoing meetings with the project team partners, and stakeholders (including SoE staff)
- Collaborative partnership between the four University areas involved in the project—SoE, NWC, IS and LTU
- Inclusion of SoE staff in professional development for cultural competency and curriculum renewal to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspective in course
- Development of sustainable ongoing professional learning for SoE staff
- Development of staff professional development workshops on cultural competence.

5 Evaluation of project outcomes

This project's goals have a longer reach than the one-year timeframe of the project itself. The project was designed around certain goals, and as the team collected data in the first two phases of the project it became apparent that staff needs were considerable and that a longer-term view was required for the full realisation of these goals. Given this new information, in the latter phases of the project we adapted our focus to be more appropriate for meeting the needs of staff at their current stage in the learning process. We also put mechanisms in place that will see our original goals achieved in a three-year timeframe. These mechanisms are:

- The 'Embedding Perspectives' Google Site, which will grow organically over time to keep pace with staff knowledge and capability
- The 2015 Professional Learning Day, building on the strong impact of the 2014 session
- The proposed Indigenous Advisory Group, which will oversee the integration of this work in the School.

This project can be evaluated according to the OLT evaluation project guidelines as follows.

1. Proactive

Phase 1 of the project involved extensive consultation with staff, including Indigenous staff members. AITSL and ACARA standards were mapped to identify requisite capabilities of graduating teacher education students. Existing Bachelor of Education Primary courses were also mapped to identify gaps and potential for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives. The project team conducted a literature review to identify models of good practice.

2. Clarify

The team performed a needs analysis for SoE staff following this initial research. Its purpose was to clarify their current knowledge and measure that against our goals and the requirements of AITSL and CCP.

3. Interactive

The strong partnerships within this project – particularly with Nikki Moodie of Indigenous Specialisation as one of the project leaders – facilitated consultation and discussion throughout. Our consultation with Ngarara Willim and LTU also helped to assess and direct the changes that were necessary following evaluation of the data from Phase 1.

4. Monitor

The project team held regular meetings throughout the year. SoE staff involved in interviews and the Professional Learning Day workshop were very positive and open to the work being done on this project.

5. Impact

Because of the recalibration required as a result of the needs analysis, the impact of the project's outcomes and deliverables cannot yet be measured in full. For Phases 3 and 4 of the project we modified our outcomes and as a result of consultation and collaboration, determined that our efforts would be best placed on the three tools mentioned above: the Google Site, the Professional Learning Day and the Indigenous Advisory Group. While the Google Site is due to be launched shortly, the timing of the second Professional Learning Day, and the development of an Indigenous Advisory Group for the School is better placed for 2015.

Publication plan

Working Title	Lead writers	Proposed Target Journal
<i>Indigenous educational policy in Australia: What's the "problem" represented to be? - lead</i>	Rachel Patrick and Nikki Moodie	<i>Race, Ethnicity and Education</i> OR <i>Discourse</i>
<i>"What are Indigenous learning styles": AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers and constructions of "the" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learner as deficit other?</i>	Nikki Moodie and Rachel Patrick	<i>Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education</i>
<i>Popular tropes (romanticisation) of Indigenous people in pop culture</i>	Emily Gray	<i>Social Identities: Journal for the study of race, nation and culture</i>
<i>Professional Experience in "Indigenous communities": White fantasy of a magical Black central Australia</i>	Rachel Patrick, Emily Gray and Nikki Moodie	<i>Australian Journal of Indigenous Education</i> OR <i>Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education</i>
<i>Developing sociological thinking of educators: How do teacher educators position themselves in relation to Indigenous peoples, histories and cultures?</i>	Nikki Moodie, Rachel Patrick and Emily Gray	<i>Journal of Sociology</i> OR One of the sociology of education journals (British or American)