

BANGAYA BULBUWUL MURU (DHARUG) - LET'S MAKE STRONG PATHWAYS

ANISSA JONES

Anissa Jones explores the importance and practicalities of including Cultural Awareness and Cultural Safety in all TAFE courses. She discusses how to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to feel safe and part of the TAFE community...

Vocational Education for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students should never be a challenge - for our students or teachers. We need to empower our mob to be the best they can be, whilst maintaining their connections to culture, community and language. It can't just be in the Aboriginal Studies space where this is found.

It starts with reviewing current practices in the delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses and how we can move away from the Westernised way of thinking in order to teach a more holistic approach that supports our students. How can teachers be best equipped to support their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students?

We need to move away from the outdated assessment models that do not cater for the needs of our students. This involves taking a deeper dive into how they learn and why before we assess whether they can. We need to look at ways of knowing, being and doing, as well as providing a culturally safe learning space either online, or face to face, before any successful learning can occur. Students need to feel that they have a voice, a say in what works for them and feel safe to share that with their teachers and peers.

Sometimes it's as simple as that.....listening.

Teaching at TAFE can be filled with mountains of compliance, taking time away from the learning. It can also be a place where Culturally Safe practices are absent. When we do take the time to be present in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spaces, listening and learning can take place.

Too often we are asked to complete training that is merely a tick-box with no thought on the practices behind it. There must be a real focus on Cultural Practices, Cultural Knowledge and respect. These can't be taught via a Moodle.

Currently the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment

Education (TAE40116) does not contain a unit on First Nations andragogy. It is merely a footnote in the Language, Literacy and Numeracy (TAELLN411) unit of competency.

How can we make change when it isn't included in the fundamental training course required to be TAFE Teachers?

To make an impact, we need to start with education.

Training should be provided to all teaching staff in various ways. Cultural Awareness and Cultural Safety.

These are two separate things that can have an impact on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and students in various ways.

Cultural Awareness - shows **respect** for the culture with whom one is working, which can aid people working with these communities to build better relationships and be more effective in their work.(ANU, 2023)¹

Cultural Safety - is about **creating an environment** that is safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.(Vic Health, 2023)²

But we really should be aiming for **Cultural Capability** - basically it's 'walk the walk and talk the talk'.

"Cultural capability refers to the skills, knowledge, behaviours and systems that are required to plan, support, improve and deliver services in a culturally respectful and appropriate manner." (QLD Health, 2022)³

TAFE NSW has designed and developed a Course in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Cultural Education (known as ACEP) to provide training in Aboriginal andragogy - Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being or Doing. To maintain cultural integrity in delivery, trainers must be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

To deliver the Aboriginal Cultural Education Program (ACEP), you must be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Currently there are approximately 130 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teachers in TAFE NSW. However, this

training is vital to support the wellbeing and Cultural Safety of staff and students.

The need across the nation to employ more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander trainers and assessors is important. Having programs where pay to train is offered to niche industry skills areas could be a viable solution. Hopefully, a program can be developed for Aboriginal Language Teachers to build capacity across the state.

When writing curriculum for Training packages and accredited qualifications for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People, the need to engage, consult and co-design with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Subject Matter Experts (SME) is vital for the cultural safety of the training. This will ensure language discourse is centred around such practices and allow Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples to have a greater impact in the delivery. From this, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) will be able to offer a qualification that is fit for purpose and provides all important Culturally Safe components. In order for all stakeholder to achieve their goals, the place of learning must be friendly and inviting for all.

It is important to provide Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students with a Culturally Safe learning environment within the Certificate IV in Training and Education (TAE). The length of time, the onerous assessments and the lack of Cultural Safety continue to push Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students out of the course. Even with the new changes coming in, there is little to no expectation that a TAFE teacher is required to have completed one unit on Aboriginal Studies, unlike our school based colleagues. Recently South Australia Training and Skills Minister Blair Boyer made the push to address racism in the Responsible Service of Alcohol Training Packages, which had been renewed in 2021 with this clause still in it. This change was long overdue but highlights the trauma that can occur from stereotyping Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

“Federal assessment requirements for the RSA certification, required for workers to serve alcohol in public settings, state that participants must learn about the “impact of excessive drinking” on local neighbourhoods, premises, staff, customers and “particular types of customers who are at heightened risk” - with the first group

on that list being “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.”⁴(Guardian, 2023)

SO WHAT CAN I DO?

1. You can complete a Cultural Safety audit at your campus or workplace.

Victoria Legal Aid has a Cultural Safety Reflection Tool that you can use like a WHS audit. You can access it [here](#)

2. You can undertake Cultural Awareness and Cultural Safety training in your state or territory.

3. You can start by engaging with your local Aboriginal Community.

Things to remember:

a) Follow Cultural Protocols - go with respect and be prepared to just listen.

b) Understand the difference between a Traditional Owner/Custodian and/or Elder and a Community Elder.

i) Traditional Owners/Custodians and Elders live on Country. They are from the Nation and/or Language dialect of the lands on which they live and work.

ii) Community Elders live away from their Country but are seen as respected members of the Community.

c) Understand that our ways of knowing, being and doing are very different from Western Civilisation. Aboriginal Community members may not get back to you as quickly as you would like.

4. Be prepared to learn.

5. Be careful of the use of deficit speech such as ‘Closing the Gap’ - this requires Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples to meet the bare minimum of Westernised Education.

SO WHAT DOES A CULTURALLY SAFE CLASSROOM LOOK LIKE?

- Inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives, history and knowledge into your classroom practice.
- Awareness of Sorry Business, Cultural Responsibilities and Roles which may cause a student or staff member to be away for long periods of time and to make adjustments to their workload.

- Acknowledgment to Country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags are clearly seen on TAFE Campuses.
- Have signs of Aboriginal Culture around your room or campus (e.g., artwork, books, seating, resources)
- Invite Community members into your classrooms as guest speakers/co-teachers - It is important to ensure they are remunerated accordingly for their time and their knowledge.
- Be open to learning and change. Listen to your students and make the appropriate changes based upon their needs.
- Be aware that English may be a 2nd, 3rd or 4th language for your student/s. They may speak their language/s, Creole, Pidgin or Aboriginal English as well as English. They might require a translator or additional support, just as you would for other EAL/D student.
- Be transparent and if you make a mistake; apologise. Once an Aboriginal person's trust is gone, it can be very hard to get back.

DOES THIS ALREADY EXIST IN VET?

Nationally accredited courses like Indigenous Policing Our Way Delivery (IPROWD), Diploma of Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Languages provide Culturally Safe environments for students. The curriculum is tailored to the students, the teachers are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, an Aboriginal Student Support Officer (ASSO) is attached to the class and Cultural knowledge is shared in a communal way, not teacher-student but as a Community. There is no hierarchy in Aboriginal Education.

They are the exception to the rule as most staff and students are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This does not diminish the great work Teachers at TAFE do, but it does show that when Aboriginal Education is at the forefront of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander's learning journey, great things happen.

END NOTES

1. <https://earlytraumagrieff.anu.edu.au/resource-centre/indigenous-children-and-families-cultural-awareness#:~:text=Cultural%20awareness%20shows%20respect%20for,more%20effective%20in%20their%20work.>

2. <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/health-strategies/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety#:~:text=Cultural%20safety%20is%20about%20creating,shared%20meaning%20and%20shared%20knowledge>
3. <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/groups/atsihealth/cultural-capability#:~:text=Cultural%20capability%20refers%20to%20the,culturally%20respectful%20and%20appropriate%20manner.>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/feb/24/indigenous-australians-racially-profiled-in-alcohol-training-courses-sa-minister-says4>

REFERENCES

- Australian National University (ANU) (updated 2023) *Indigenous Children and Families : Cultural Awareness* <https://earlytraumagrieff.anu.edu.au/resource-centre/indigenous-children-and-families-cultural-awareness#:~:text=Cultural%20awareness%20shows%20respect%20for,more%20effective%20in%20their%20work.>
- Guardian the (2023) *Indigenous Australians racially profiled in alcohol training courses, SA minister says* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/feb/24/indigenous-australians-racially-profiled-in-alcohol-training-courses-sa-minister-says>
- Queensland Health (updated 2022) *Cultural Capability* <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/groups/atsihealth/cultural-capability#:~:text=Cultural%20capability%20refers%20to%20the,culturally%20respectful%20and%20appropriate%20manner.>
- Victorian Department of Health (updated 2023) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety* <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/health-strategies/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety#:~:text=Cultural%20safety%20is%20about%20creating,shared%20meaning%20and%20shared%20knowledge>
- Victoria Legal Aid *Cultural Safety Reflection Tool* <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/vla-organisational-cultural-safety-tool-template-accessible.docx>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anissa Jones is currently at TAFE NSW. She is the Accredited Course Specialist and Teacher based in Cootamundra. She is a proud Boorooberongal Dharug woman from the Richmond area in New South Wales.

Anissa has taught for over twenty years in both the ACT and NSW in a variety of roles ranging from preschool to university. Whilst in the ACT, Anissa was an assistant RTO Manager of a small RTO based across several secondary schools primarily in the Tuggeranong area, managing compliance, professional development and training. After completing the MILE program in 2022, Anissa began teaching Dharug Dhalang at TAFE NSW in Certificate I to Dharug Community members and teachers, with Certificate II starting mid-year.

Currently Anissa holds the position of TAFE TA Executive Member for NSWTF and is the NSW TAFE representative on Yalukit Yulendj – the AEU's Executive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers and most recently presented at TAFE Directors Australia on Aboriginal Pathways in VET.

