From scholarship to practice

By Trish Chapman

SSTUWA member and union scholarship recipient Trish Chapman reflects on how deeper study strengthened her teaching and community connections.

In 2014, I began my career as a graduate teacher in Tom Price. Like many new educators, my Bachelor of Education, Early Childhood Studies degree offered only a single unit on Aboriginal Education – a brief introduction that did not prepare me for the realities of working with First Nations students and families.

In that community, I quickly became aware of how underprepared I was to engage meaningfully with Aboriginal students. Through reflection, I recognised how much my views had been subconsciously influenced by the media and how the education system itself continues to expose First Nations students to policies and programs grounded in white based perspectives.

Confronting this gap in my cultural competency was challenging, yet it motivated me to learn, listen and grow in ways that would allow me to better support Aboriginal students and families.

That journey has carried me forward to my current role as a senior teacher, where cultural inclusivity and respect are embedded in my practice.

My postgraduate journey in this area began in 2022, when I completed a Graduate Certificate in Education (Indigenous Education) through the Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

That program gave me essential background knowledge, particularly through units such as:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and societies.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and policy since 1788.
- Global perspectives in Indigenous education.
- Personal journeys in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

Together, these studies provided a strong foundation for understanding the historical and cultural contexts of Aboriginal education.

They deepened my awareness of systemic challenges and strengths within schools, while also encouraging me to reflect on my own journey as an educator.

In 2024, with the support of the SSTUWA scholarship, I was able to extend this learning by enrolling in a Graduate Certificate in Education, specialising in First Nations Education Practice, at QUT.

This program shifted the focus from history and policy to pedagogy and curriculum design, with units including:

- Pedagogy in First Nations education practice.
- Designing curriculum in First Nations education practice.
- Designing for learning in First Nations education practice.

These units challenged me to think deeply about how teaching and learning can be shaped by Indigenous pedagogies, emphasising connection to place, people and lived experience.

While each unit ran for 13 weeks, I realised that such a short timeframe is only the beginning – the content requires ongoing reflection and practice to truly grasp and embed.

The scholarship gave me the opportunity to take this step, and it continues to inspire me to keep learning beyond the classroom walls.

The scholarship support was invaluable. Financially, it eased the burden of study costs and allowed me to commit fully to

the program without the constant worry of balancing expenses.

Professionally, it gave me confidence and validation that my growth as an educator mattered – that investing in cultural responsiveness is recognised as essential to our profession.

Personally, it was a reminder of the power of community: that my union stands behind teachers who want to make a difference.

The impact of these studies is already visible in my classroom. I feel better equipped to design learning experiences that honour Aboriginal perspectives, build stronger relationships with families and create spaces where students feel their identities are respected and celebrated.

The scholarship didn't just fund a course – it opened a pathway for me to continue learning, reflecting and embedding First Nations education practice into everything I do.

This commitment to collaboration and cultural responsiveness was recently recognised when I received the Jane Hansen Teach For Australia Alumni Impact Award for Stakeholder Collaboration in 2025.

The award affirmed that the learning supported by the SSTUWA scholarship is not only strengthening my teaching but also building meaningful connections across the wider community.

I am deeply grateful to the SSTUWA for supporting my postgraduate studies. The scholarship has not only strengthened my practice but also reinforced my commitment to ongoing learning.

As I continue my journey, I hope to contribute to a broader shift in our schools and education system – one where First Nations perspectives are embedded authentically and every student feels seen, valued and respected.

Trish Chapman is a senior teacher at Tom Price Primary School and the recipient of the 2023 SSTUWA Scholarship.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026