Culturally responsive tools for WA teachers

By Pamela Chatfield



As the School Curriculum and Standards Authority updates its curricula, it is even more important for schools and teachers to take a fresh look at how they teach about the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, not to mention how that lines up with staff professional learning, schools plans and policies and the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework.

If the 2023 Voice Referendum taught us anything, it taught us about the impact of education on the rest of society.

So many older voters struggled to decide how to cast their vote because they did not have the historical and cultural knowledge to make an informed decision for the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. That is the impact of a lack of education from our nation's past, but it cannot be the future for current students.

There are quality resources that WA teachers can access to ensure their students learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures from sources that can be trusted. Two such sources are Reconciliation WA and Narragunnawali.

Reconciliation WA (RWA) is a not-for-profit organisation providing leadership, advocacy and support to people and organisations driving the reconciliation movement in Western Australia.

Through education, support and reconciliation programs, RWA focuses on the creation of social and economic outcomes to ensure the cultures, rights and contributions of Aboriginal Peoples are valued and respected.

There are a range of different resources RWA can provide for schools that will support teachers in WA to continue the work of educating Western Australians.

Professional learning can be accessed a variety of ways: through the online self-paced adult learning tool, the Learning Hub; through attending Education Reconciliation Industry Network Groups (online or in-person) to network and hear the reconciliation journeys of other schools; through the anti-racism workshop, Education, Action and Change; or a bespoke

workshop session.

Students can learn from an elder and non-Indigenous facilitator to focus their learning on culture and history through the Year 4, Year 5 or Year 6 programs that align with the civics and citizenship or history subjects. (These can also be aligned for Year 9 and 10 students.)

These hour-long lessons can be delivered at your school or at The Constitutional Centre of WA in West Perth (alongside constitutional, electoral or parliamentary education programs from those organisations).

These are pay-for-service excursion and incursion opportunities that are provided by educators in-person.

However, the RWA website has so much more for schools, including how to find Aboriginal cultural providers and other online resources.

For more details about all opportunities, you can find information on the RWA website, including becoming an individual, family or school member to support the work and learn more: recwa.org.au

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program supports schools and early learning services nationally to actively engage the hearts and minds of future generations to contribute to reconciliation between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Narragunnawali provides a free online resource that supports the development of school-based Reconciliation Action Plans, teacher professional learning and curriculum resources.

These resources are created in a culturally authentic way, with the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at the forefront. You can access this resource at narragunnawali.org.au

So many teachers fear this cross-curriculum priority because they are concerned that they will make mistakes. They will. We ask students to feel the fear and do it anyway every day. As teachers, we need to lead by example – we need to take the plunge and fill the gaps in our knowledge: unlearn, learn and relearn about these nationally important histories and cultures.

We need to accept any criticism for mistakes made as opportunities to grow, build relationships, open our minds to new perspectives of this land and its peoples and drive change in our schools.

The biggest mistake teachers can make is to do nothing.

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