First Nations curriculum inclusion push supported

More than 150 Indigenous education experts and practitioners have issued a statement responding to mistruths in relation to the Australian Curriculum review by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

The signatories, who together represent over 2,168 years of teaching experience, agree that the proposed changes to the curriculum will assist teachers and educators to make the curriculum more culturally responsive and inclusive.

They are joined by a coalition of 10 education sector peak bodies, who have signed a joint letter to the Minister for Education expressing strong support for the inclusion of First Nations' histories and cultures, and for greater truth-telling in the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Education Union is proud to support the statement on the Australian Curriculum from First Nations Experts on Education.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals' Association President Dyonne Anderson said the goal was to improve the education system to ensure the best possible outcome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, while at the same time ensuring all students have the opportunity to learn about the unique first cultures of this land.

"Our vision clearly reflects the national vision of ensuring all students learn about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to seeing all young First Nations Australians thrive in their education, as agreed to by Ministers

through the 2019 Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Declaration," she said.

Reservoir East Primary School (Melbourne) prep teacher Alinta Iddles-Williams said: "The arguments being made by some education leaders that this review will 'Indigenise' the curriculum are utterly false. This is about broadening students' perspectives, not narrowing them."

"We need to give our students a lot more credit. They are keen to engage with different ways of looking at the world," she continued.

"Even though most of the changes suggested by the review sit in the non- mandatory part of the curriculum, they still suggest ways teachers can use content to support students to understand First Nations perspectives.

"For example, if you are doing work on the seasons children can look at local Indigenous seasons and how they relate to the changes they are seeing in the weather. They might also walk on country with a local elder, which gives them a chance to build relationships, empathy and understanding."

Bwgcolman Community School Principal Beresford Domic highlighted the importance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum perspective at his Palm Island school.

"We aim to help our students maintain a strong cultural identity while also developing the skills necessary to participate in the global community," he said.

"Respect, responsibility and safety are at the forefront of everything we do. Ensuring our students have the opportunity to see themselves – their experiences – reflected in the curriculum is a critical element of this work.

"As a nation, we all have a role to play in helping to close the gap. There are clear opportunities through the Australian Curriculum to help ensure First Nations students have the opportunity thrive in their education, and at the same time help ensure all students in Australia have a better understanding of the diverse and unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures."

Ms Anderson urged members of the Australian public to support the modest changes proposed by this review and encourage all supporters of the changes to put in a submission to the ACARA curriculum review.

The AEU states that it: “Supports the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority and the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the mandatory key learning areas and non-mandatory content elaborations.”

“All students should have the opportunity to learn about the unique first cultures of this land. Including cross-curriculum priority is about broadening students’ perspectives and suggesting ways teachers can use content to support students to understand First Nations perspectives,” the AEU says.

The full statement from the First Nations Experts on Education can be read on the following page.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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