

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures: A Cross-Curriculum Priority

## Abstract

First Nations people of Australia bear the burden of colonisation in many forms including educational disadvantage. The lack of engagement with the current educational system is depicted by the low attendance rates, disengagement, and the unremitting inability to match the national standards in reading and numeracy. Indigenous education reform has been a policy agenda for over 50 years, aiming for equity in education. Since the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in 2012, the national curriculum includes Aboriginal Histories and Cultures as a Cross Curriculum Priority (CCP) to 'close the gap' and engage Indigenous students. The intended use of the CCP is to familiarise all students with the Indigenous perspectives, ways of learning and to build mutual respect and recognition. This research aims to find out how this Cross Curriculum Priority is being embedded across schools in the Northern Territory urban primary schools that not only have a significant number of Indigenous students but also present a unique set of challenges for those students. In order to assess the current practice and perspectives, primary school teachers from the four major urban centers of Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, and Alice Springs region were assigned a survey followed by voluntary semi-structured interviews. The methods aim to ascertain the planning and delivery of the CCP through the use of content descriptors cited in the Australian Curriculum and dig deeper into teachers' perspectives on Indigenous engagement. Insights regarding the cultural responsiveness of Northern Territory primary school teachers may help improve or strengthen teacher practice and school ethos across the region so that eventually Indigenous engagement is more than a curriculum priority. Not only limited to the Northern Territory, an authentic understanding of Indigenous culture and perspectives is integral to a school's philosophy and practice and ultimately a professional expectation of the educators.