



# Cultural Actions Catalogue





**Be You acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Land on which we work, including the Traditional Owners of the Kimberley and Pilbara where this resource was developed. We recognise their ongoing connection to the Land and sea, and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.**

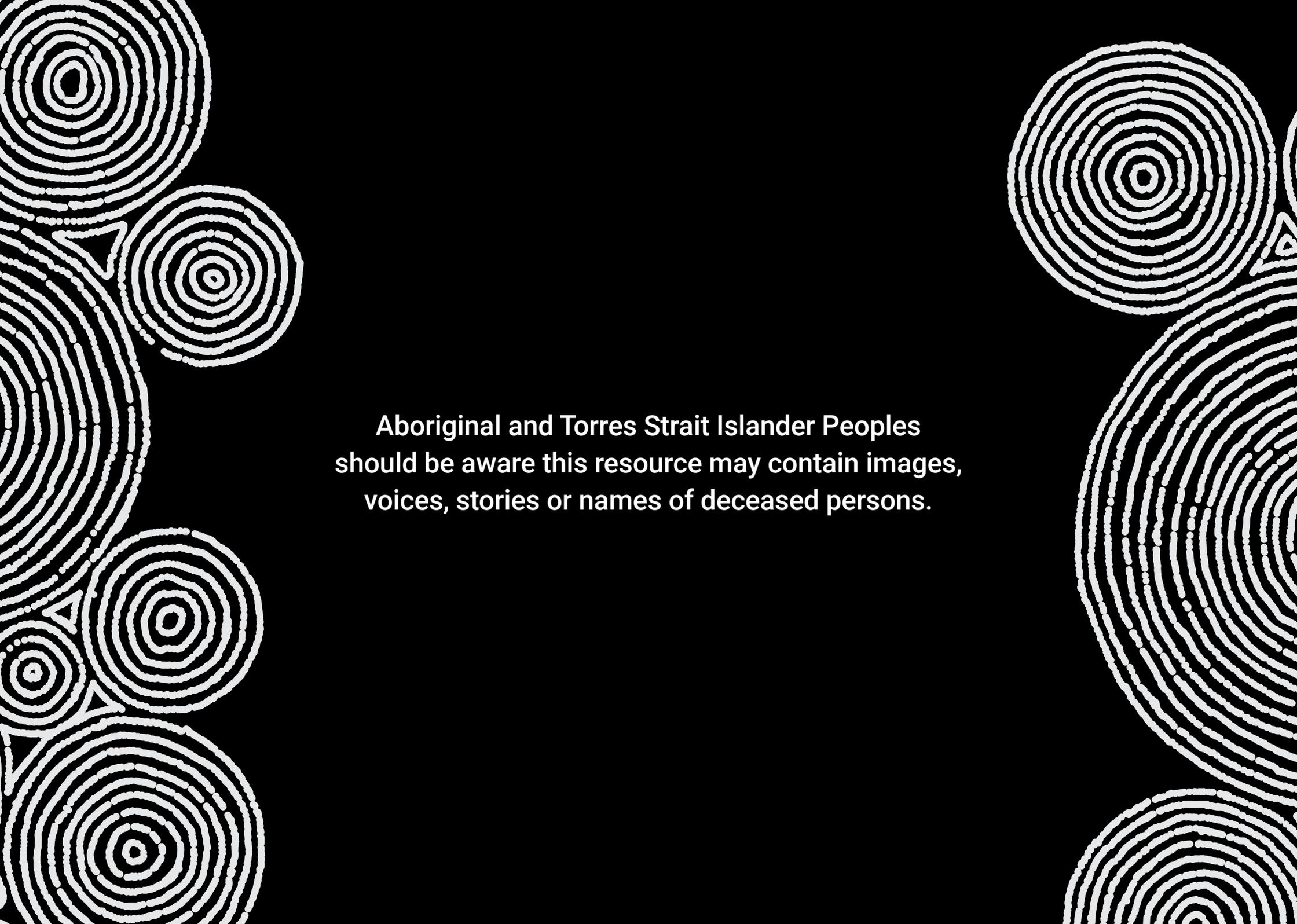
**We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, and extend our respect to all Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia.**

With delivery partners



**Australian Government  
Department of Health  
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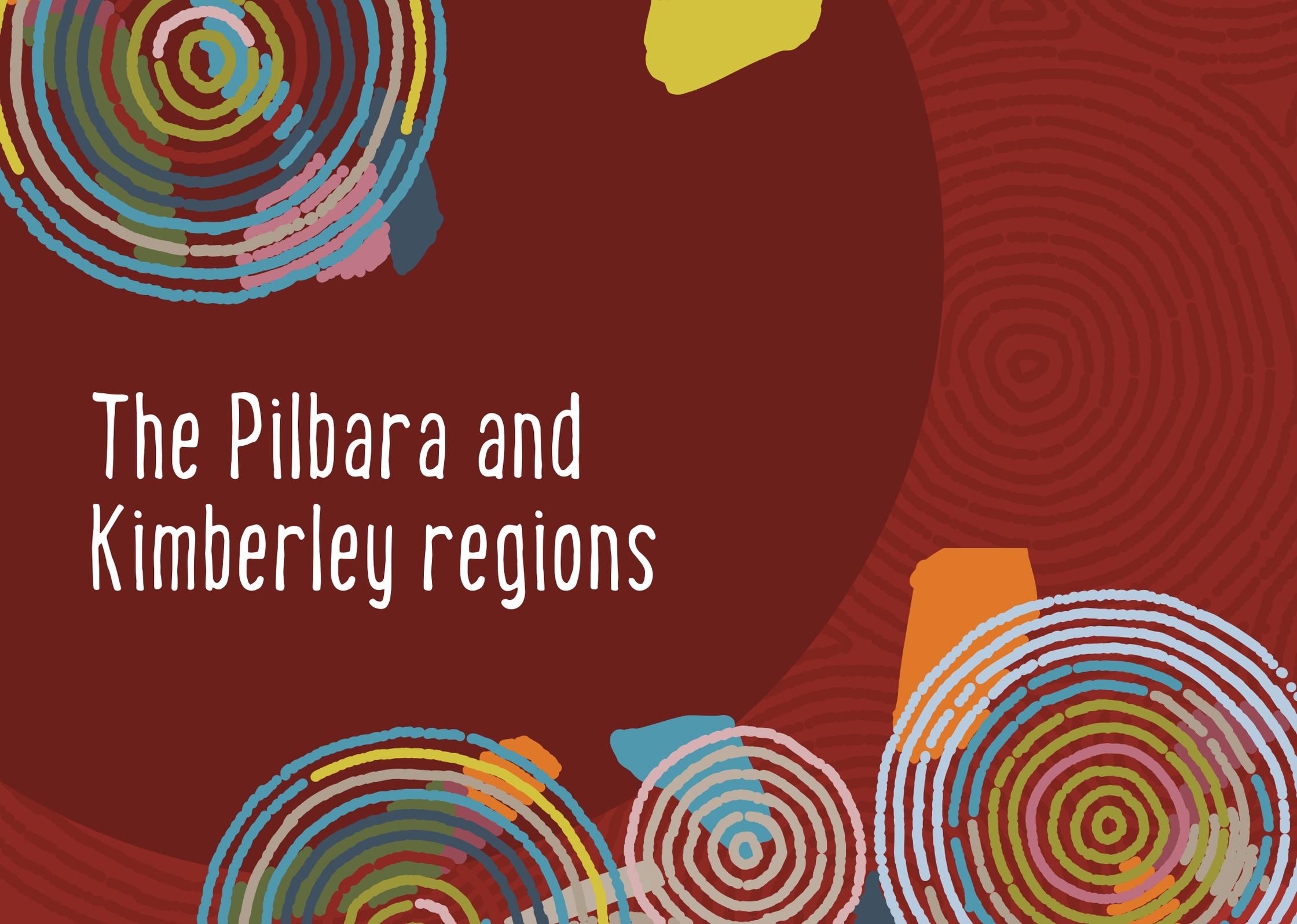


**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples  
should be aware this resource may contain images,  
voices, stories or names of deceased persons.**



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# The Pilbara and Kimberley regions

Aboriginal Peoples live in 'two worlds'. They maintain connections to their traditional Lands, waters, cultural practices and protocols, while also navigating the Western world.

Colonisation and subsequent government policies aimed at protection and assimilation have affected Aboriginal Peoples' lives since the 1800s. The establishment of vast pastoral leases over their Lands had severe impacts on their rights as traditional landowners. Many were sent to Rottnest Island Prison for killing and stealing cattle and sheep. Others were forced into labour in the pearling industry and died as far away as the Pilbara coast.

Station owners took advantage of the cultural and spiritual connection Aboriginal Peoples had to their Land – and their need to stay on the Land – and made them work for little or no wages. They endured this because they couldn't bear the thought of leaving their Land, which they considered family. In the Pilbara, it was common practice to forcibly keep Aboriginal people on pastoral stations until the 1946 strike for fair wages and better working conditions.

Legislation was enforced that had far-reaching impacts on the wellbeing of Aboriginal Peoples. This included the forced removal of children, who were sent to missions, set up by the government and church groups, including Jigalong in the Pilbara and Beagle Bay in the Kimberley. For more information on missions, visit the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' (AIATSIS) Mission and reserve records: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/family-history/family-history-sources/official-records/mission-and-reserve-records>

Children removed from their families became known as the Stolen Generations. They sought to reconnect with their families, identity, cultures, Countries and sense of belonging.

Families were also moved from their Country on to Aboriginal reserves, usually located on the margins of towns. Intergenerational trauma continues to affect Aboriginal communities. For more information about the Stolen Generations and intergenerational trauma, check out the Healing Foundation's resources here: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/>

Aboriginal Peoples' place in Australia has only been legally recognised since 1967. This is a very short timeframe in which they have had to accommodate Western culture.



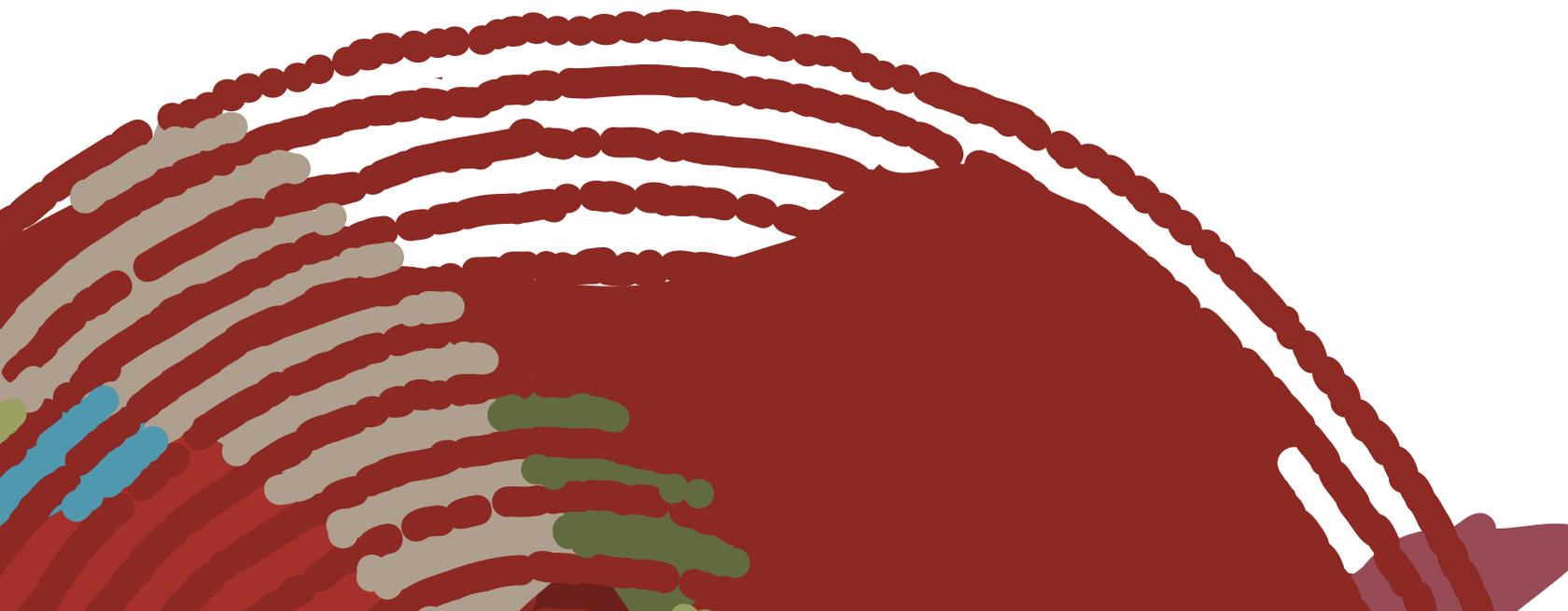
Over time, increased self-determination and empowerment opportunities have enabled progressive steps to be taken. Policy changes are leading towards the delivery of better outcomes for recognition, justice, equity, employment, training, education, health and housing.

Aboriginal Peoples continue to connect with their families, and each other, to fight for recognition of ownership through Native Title Claims and compensation for the destruction of Lands through mining leases.

With this historical context in mind, it's important to work with Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, Aboriginal Teaching Assistants, families, caregivers and communities to ensure schools are culturally aware and responsive, trauma-informed and welcoming.

The Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue has been developed with communities across the Pilbara and Kimberley to help educators identify short and long-term actions to create inclusive and respectful learning communities that embrace the history and cultures of these regions.

*“We need to focus on survival and celebrate the strength of connection we are finding again.”  
- Jigalong community member*



## Project background

The Pilbara and Kimberley Project started in 2019, and its key aim was to pilot a culturally appropriate, place-based implementation of Be You in schools in these regions.

Be You is the national mental health in education initiative, with the goal that every learning community is positive, inclusive and resilient – a place where every child, young person, educator and family can achieve their best possible mental health. It promotes this through professional learning, resources, tools and actions educators can apply in their learning community.

The Pilbara and Kimberley Project was funded by the Federal Government as part of a raft of suicide prevention programs for young Aboriginal people in these regions.

Be You engaged in meaningful partnerships with local Aboriginal Medical Services and whole-of-school communities in a collaborative design process, which informed and shaped the culturally responsive delivery and implementation of Be You in rural and remote learning environments.

The project service delivery providers included Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services, Puntuturnu Aboriginal Medical Service, Derby Aboriginal Health Service, Yura Yungi Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation, Wirraka Maya Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, Mawarnkarra Health Service and Kununurra Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation.

These partners worked face-to-face with local schools to implement Be You in a culturally responsive manner. Through extensive community and school engagement, it was found a place-based resource that supports local, Aboriginal perspectives on social and emotional wellbeing would help implement Be You in regional and remote Aboriginal communities.

All the content in this resource has been informed by community members and educators in the Kimberley and Pilbara through a co-designed, two-year process. Stories have been shared by Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO) and Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATA), educators, Elders, community members, local rangers, natural helpers, family members, social and emotional wellbeing providers, health care workers and chief executive officers.

This eBook has been designed to encourage AIEO and ATA involvement in schools Be You Action Teams, and their active participation in planning and conducting activities informed by a culturally responsive action plan.

We hope this resource is a stepped introduction to Be You, where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators are encouraged to explore and engage the significant resources available to them through Be You modules, fact sheets and other resources.



The background is a dark blue-grey color. It features several large, colorful, concentric circular patterns made of small dots or dashes. The colors used in these patterns include yellow, orange, red, pink, purple, and green. There are also some solid-colored organic shapes, such as a large orange shape in the upper right, a yellow shape in the upper left, and a pink shape in the lower left. The overall style is abstract and artistic.

Truth-telling

The Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue has resulted from extensive consultation, over an 18-month period, with community members, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO), Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATA), Aboriginal medical service workers and educators in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions.

The process of truth-telling not only brings to light Australia's history of colonial conflict and dispossession, it's also a way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples share who they are, how they feel, their spiritual connection and their connection to Country and their own experiences.

By sharing their stories, communities across the Kimberley and Pilbara informed this culturally responsive resource for primary and secondary educators. It offers an insight into the collective sentiment families and caregivers expressed – a strong desire for a safe learning environment for their children and the importance of promoting healthy social and emotional wellbeing practices in schools and the wider community.

The 'Journey of health and wellbeing' animated video, developed by the Western Australian Department of Health, can help promote understanding of Aboriginal Peoples' experiences from colonisation to the present day. You can watch it here: <https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/News/The-journey-of-health-and-wellbeing>

Education plays a significant part in sharing and understanding stories, and being culturally responsive requires two-way learning. Furthermore, educators are in a unique position to notice and support children and young people who may be showing signs of social and emotional wellbeing issues. As an educator you become a part of the truth-telling process, assisting children and young people to share their stories.

Be You recognises that many Aboriginal-identifying students walk between two worlds – Aboriginal and Western ones – and that two-way learning is central to the development of the whole child. To better understand and meaningfully connect with students and their caregivers, it's important educators are prepared to learn and be open to delivering lessons in a manner that resonates with children and young people. For some educators, this can mean finding peace in their discomfort and reward within in a challenging environment.

It's intended that newly arrived educators who are unfamiliar with rural or remote environments, use this resource to gain an improved understanding of four topics which – in the eyes of community members – are central to being regarded as a *“Good teacher... someone you can trust”*:

#### **AIEOs/ATAs**

#### **Walk softly**

#### **Identify and build connections**

#### **Provide flexible, culturally responsive education**

As with many initiatives that are co-designed, “the strength is in the story”. Therefore, this resource contains the stories and experiences of Aboriginal people from both regions to enable you to understand the local context and encourage awareness of the connection between the concepts.





Please see page 57 for video transcript

## How to use this resource

This Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue includes a diverse collection of actions that supports learning communities to be more culturally responsive. These range from actions that can be implemented relatively quickly, through to those requiring more time and effort. Each action can be adapted and contextualised to meet your learning community's needs before adding to your Be You Action Plan here: <https://beyou.edu.au/>

## Place-based

Place-based is defined as an approach that involves bringing people together, such as a school or wider community, to address complex local needs by harnessing the vision, resources and opportunities in the community.

This resource has been specifically developed with Aboriginal communities and schools in the Kimberley and Pilbara, outlining concepts and actions that are unique to these regions. Due to the localised nature of this project, this eBook doesn't explicitly refer to Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Be You, nonetheless, acknowledges their continuing connections to Land and sea.

## Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue in your own setting

Although developed as a place-based resource for primary and secondary school educators, the Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue can be adapted and applied in any learning community, anywhere in Australia. This includes early learning services. Consider the resource a starting point to think about how your learning community can be more inclusive, culturally responsive and incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history. Check out the 'Cultural Actions' section to find cultural, historical and language information specific to the Land where you and your learning community are.



## When can we use this resource?

You can refer to this resource throughout the Be You Implementation Cycle during stage 3: Develop a plan.

## How can our Be You Consultant support us using this resource?

Your Be You Consultant is available to help you identify your priority areas and to discuss the most suitable whole-setting actions for your learning environment, taking into consideration the changing needs of the wider community.

## How does the Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue align with the Cultural Standards Framework?

The Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework (which can be found here: <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/jjpzned>) is a Western Australian Department of Education initiative that aims to translate cultural awareness into responsive actions. The framework sets standards for all staff when working with Aboriginal students, their parents and families, and communities. It has five cultural standards and a continuum aligned with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's Australian Professional Standard for Principals and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The actions in the Cultural Actions Catalogue align with the five cultural standards of relationships, leadership, teaching, learning environment and resources.





# Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers/ Aboriginal Teaching Assistants

Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO) and Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATA) are Aboriginal staff members who live in their communities and have strong connections to families, caregivers and Country. Some schools may also have Education Assistants, who provide classroom support and sometimes work directly with children and young people with additional needs.

AIEOs and ATAs help teachers deliver education programs and liaise between the school, families and caregivers, and community. They support Aboriginal students with their schoolwork – which may include help with reading or explaining activities – and social engagement by navigating conflict, whether in the classroom, playground, or out in the community. While a vital part of both the learning and wider community, AIEOs and ATAs are often significantly under-utilised.

These staff members play an important role in monitoring attendance, helping children regulate their emotions and providing cultural support. They also help educators learn about their students and communities through inductions and cultural education activities.

*“You’re not just learning about the child and connecting with the child – you’re connecting with the child and the whole community.”  
- Roebourne AIEO*

Historical factors including colonisation and forced institutionalisation have created mistrust and perceptions of schools as hubs of assimilation. For more information about this you can refer to the Bringing Them Home report here: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bringing-them-home-report-1997>. AIEOs and ATAs can help change these perceptions by doing home visits with educators to build trusting relationships with families and caregivers. Whereas educators are often transient, AIEOs and ATAs are a constant in children and their families’ lives. They are the natural helpers of their communities.

*“AIEOs, when they have something to say, they aren’t heard.”  
- Elder*



AIEOs and ATAs are deeply connected to the community, history and cultural practice, and bring their skills and wisdom into the learning community. For example, an ATA at Beagle Bay Sacred Heart School spoke about 'Cultural Fridays', during which they would teach children skills such as language, hunting and fishing. At Roebourne District High School, an AIEO spoke of leading cultural cooking lessons, teaching about Aboriginal governance of the Land and writing in the local Aboriginal language.

Another Roebourne AIEO spoke about the importance of learning on Country:

*“We used to go out bush, taking kids on Country all the time. I remember that was really exciting times for me because we used to go out and teach the teachers, and the kids as well. And you could see the interactions between the kids and the teachers. Kids would start talking, sharing what they know.”*

As mentors and role models, AIEOs and ATAs can help Aboriginal children and young people feel seen, valued and heard. They can also provide valuable insight into a child or young person's behaviour, their feelings, or even their absence from school, based on an understanding of the student's background or experience.

If a child isn't feeling OK at school or displays disruptive behaviour, you may visit the child's home with the AIEO or ATA. This is common practice for remote community schools. The presence of the AIEO or ATA at your home visits can help families feel comfortable speaking about what is happening at home that might be affecting the child at school.





Please see page 58 for video transcript

Include AIEOs or ATAs in lesson planning sessions, work development programs, individual learning pathways and class management strategies. Taking the time to build a strong two-way relationship will ensure these staff members are as valued in the classroom as they are in the community. It will also help you strengthen relationships with caregivers and families.

*“An AIEO/ATA’s work never ends when the siren goes off at 2.30, whenever, it continues on even weekends or if you no longer work in the area. As long as they know you were in that department people will always stop and ask you questions about what is happening at the school.”*  
- Elder

AIEOs and ATAs are always “on the clock”. They often answer calls or knocks on the door from children, caregivers and families at all hours, reaching into their own pockets to provide meals, clothes or school supplies when needed. For this reason, it’s crucial to ensure AIEOs and ATAs in your learning community are looking after their own wellbeing. Learn more about this in the Be You ‘Staff wellbeing’ Fact Sheet here: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/wellbeing/staff-wellbeing> and ‘Wellbeing Tools for You’ here: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>

*“They are recognised by the Aboriginal community but not so much the wider. Sometimes I think they go unnoticed because they are still working when school is finished. I take my hat off to them. They are under pressure from the kids at school and families when they go home.”*  
- Elder



# Walk softly



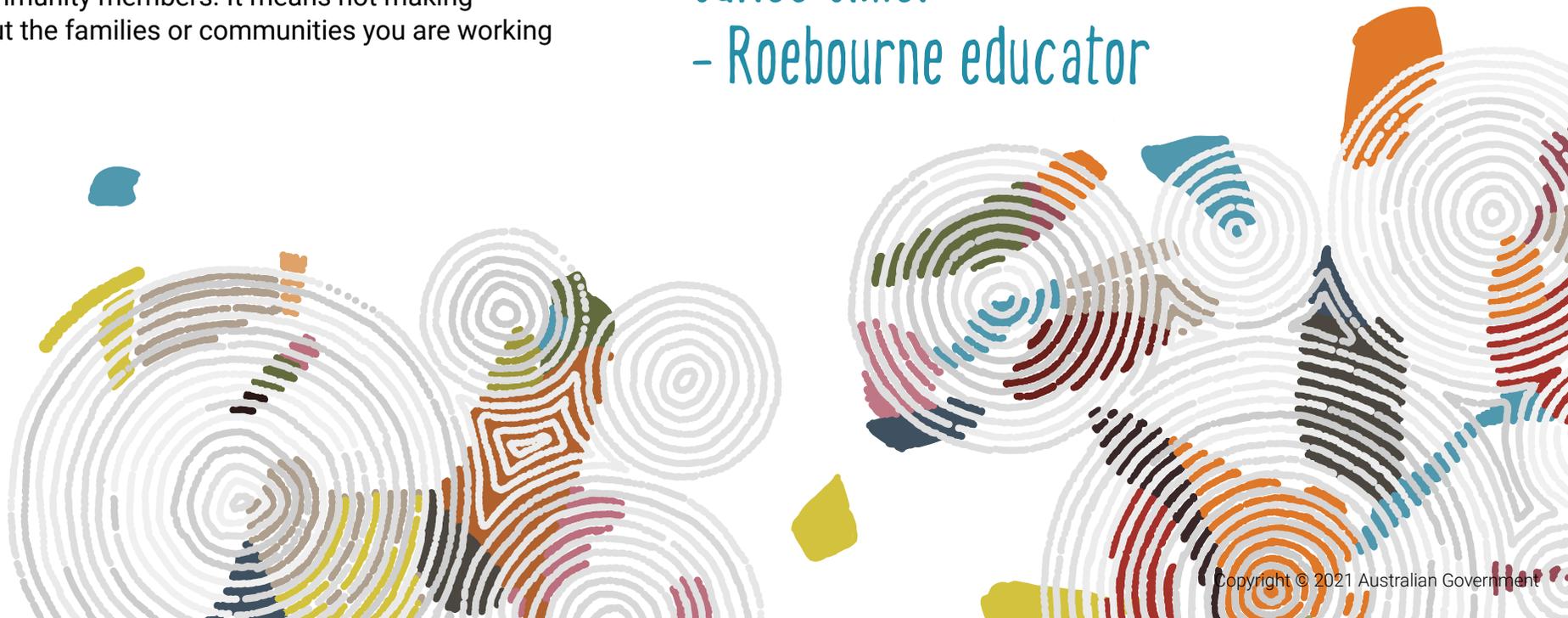
Walking softly is a way of acting and being. It's a form of two-way learning that respects and values each person's history, connections and shared attachment to a place. This practice also acknowledges the diversity of Aboriginal communities and Language Groups.

*“People come into community with differing levels of existing cultural connection – the ones who think they know (Aboriginal communities) usually make mistakes because they think we are all the same.”  
- Karratha community member*

Walking softly is how you are seen to approach, engage and connect with community members. It means not making judgements about the families or communities you are working with.

It's often not recognised that Aboriginal cultures had social systems in place to keep the people strong. For example, established law, parenting styles (including discipline), education and training, health and wellbeing, child minding services, oral historians, musicians, artists, conservationists, astronomers, geologists and meteorologists. While times have changed, these components remain in Aboriginal cultures today. Walking softly means being open to learning about these social systems and respecting them.

*“For me, walking softly is a way of saying that to be respectful takes time.”  
- Roebourne educator*





Please see page 59 for video transcript

Exercise humility and seek an introduction when meeting someone new. Develop an understanding of the concept of sideways asking, the process of communicating through a third person known to both parties, or by asking non-direct questions. This actively seeks to avoid confrontation by enabling a person to say 'no' in a non-offensive manner. You may employ sideways asking to inquire someone's name – asking directly is against protocol in the Western Desert – or if they require help.

“Don't come running in full pelt and thinking you can change everything just like that – it's like gentle waves coming in.”  
– Roebourne educator

Be prepared to invest time, sit with people, listen and remain open to community engagement opportunities outside your comfort zone. Through positive, meaningful engagement, you will be better positioned to identify your own strengths and the existing and potential strengths of the community.

To walk softly doesn't mean to be timid or abandon your values and beliefs. It's about having an awareness of your environment and placing yourself accordingly. You may be walking in a space where there are questions that can't be answered and information that is unable to be shared, due to cultural reasons. For example, in many communities it can be forbidden to say a deceased person's name – even if it's your name. Some Aboriginal customs don't allow a man to look at, or speak with, his mother-in-law.

“You need to be respectful of cultural protocols – positioning of the body, seeking permission to say your own name in a public space, seeking introduction rather than asking someone their name.”  
– Newman community member



Walking softly doesn't mean you have to try and fit into the Aboriginal context in which you may find yourself – Aboriginal people recognise when non-Aboriginal people change the way they normally speak.

*“When I was teaching, non-Aboriginal teachers would adopt Aboriginal English in an attempt to fit in and be one with Aboriginal students and community. Aboriginal people would prefer that you remain yourself while modifying how you interact with them.”*

*– Aboriginal medical service CEO*

It is a seemingly simple practice but there is a depth and complexity that can take time to grasp, understand and practise effectively. It's always best to ask Cultural Advisors about what you can and can't do in the community, how to show respect and avoid being disrespectful.

You may have done some Aboriginal cultural awareness training while studying or as part of your professional development. If not, it's advised this is where you start. Your training should be specific to the region where you'll be working. If it's a rural setting, for example, Broome, Derby, Newman or Karratha, you may be able to access localised cultural awareness training through the school. If you're teaching on community, the best people to ask are the Cultural Advisors, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO), Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATA) or the Community council.

It's through learning cultural awareness, walking softly and building meaningful relationships that you can be a welcome and effective educator in the Kimberley and Pilbara. This will help you connect with children and young people – along with their caregivers and community – and therefore be better placed to support their social and emotional wellbeing.

*“Come in with the expectation that you're going to learn something from being here as well as you learning the kids.”*

*– Roebourne AIEO*

# Identify and build connections





Please see page 61 for video transcript

As an educator working in the Kimberley or Pilbara, it's vital you build meaningful relationships with, not only the children and young people you support directly, but also their caregivers, family and the broader community.

Children, young people, families and communities don't just see you as an educator. They are also looking to find out if they can connect with you, to see if you are trustworthy, respectful and not judging them. Children and young people want to know if they are safe in the educator's hands and that they will be accepted.

Take the time to invite connection with the children and young people you are teaching. It's best when these relationships develop organically and authentically. For more information about this, check out the 'Cultural Responsiveness and School Education' report by Menzies School of Health Research here: [https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms\\_docs/312407\\_Cultural\\_Responsiveness\\_and\\_School\\_Education.pdf](https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/312407_Cultural_Responsiveness_and_School_Education.pdf)

“You can't come in and be like, 'I'm the boss because I'm the teacher'... and respect me and that's it. You can't do that, especially because these kids are making, like, adult decisions already themselves, you know, so you can't come in and be that big authority person.”  
- Roebourne educator

You'd be more aware than most that children and young people have an innate ability to see through superficial attempts at building relationships. It's helpful to share a bit about yourself with your class, such as personal interests and skills.

“Grab that connection.  
You only get a first try.  
If you don't have that connection,  
you're not going to engage them.  
So, connection is the key.”  
- Newman youth worker



For example, an educator in Roebourne played guitar for the class. The students were able to see them as more than their teacher because they shared interests beyond their professional persona. A Jigalong educator used their computer screensaver to share photos of their pets and school holiday adventures. This fostered more meaningful connections between the educator and students and started a conversation about how they spent their holidays. By being willing to share a bit about yourself, you invite connection and the opportunity to build trust and meaningful relationships.

“I think there would have been a big difference with people coming in, someone they don't know, they got to build up that relationship... you can come in and say, ‘I'm the coordinator’ but they're not going to listen to you until you show them... respect and make a bond with them.”  
- Roebourne educator

In smaller, close-knit communities, educators are more likely to see students and families outside the school environment when compared with large cities. It's important you are open to speaking with students, their caregivers and families during your own day-to-day activities, such as grocery shopping. This is an opportunity to show an interest in the child or young person's life beyond the school walls. You can also give them positive feedback in front of their family or caregivers if you meet in these informal settings. A Newman educator volunteered with local sports organisations and was able to see students “in their element”, giving the educator a chance to praise their abilities outside the school environment.

“If a lot of the feedback you get is negative then it's going to be quite hard to engage with the lady that you've only ever known to tell your child off ... it's pretty hard to go to them and say ‘Hey, I need your help.’”  
- NDIS support worker

While it's useful to be open to engaging with children, families and caregivers outside school hours, this can be overwhelming. Be You has a range of resources and tools you can use to support your own social and emotional wellbeing. For more information check out the Be You Wellbeing Tools for You page: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>





Please see page 62 for video transcript

It's important to develop an understanding of the whole child or young person. This includes their cultural background and associated traditions and practices, their family background and circumstances at home, the local history of the place they are from, but also where they live now. These can all affect how a student presents in the classroom and their readiness to engage in learning.

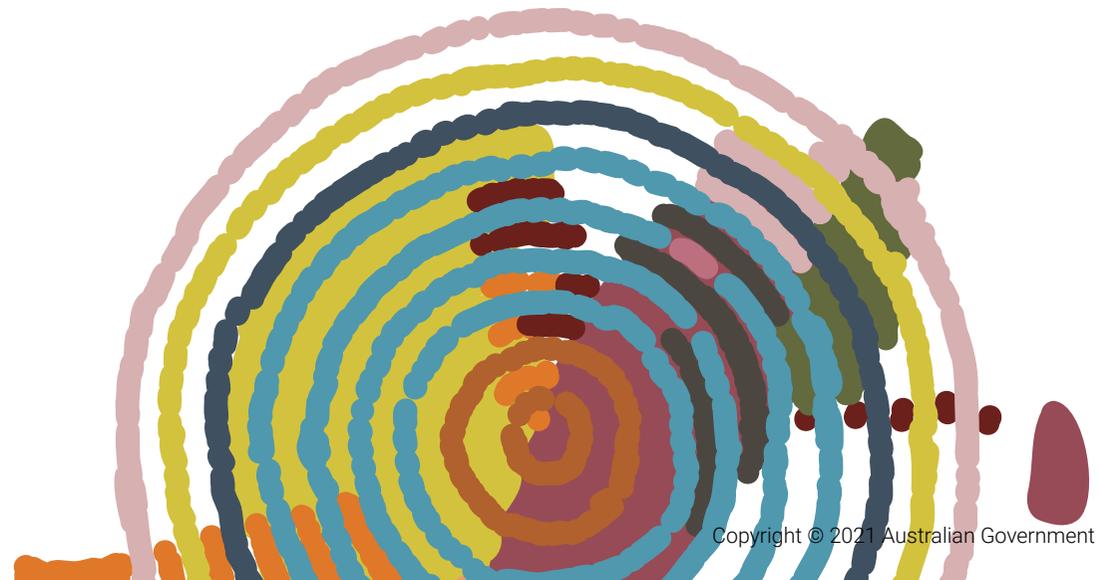
If you consider these intersecting factors, you may be able to form a well-rounded, empathetic understanding of the child or young person and identify the best ways to engage them and support their social and emotional wellbeing. You may then be better positioned to speak with students and their caregivers about this, if needed, but through a lens of respect and compassion. For more information about how intersecting factors can affect social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal children and young people, check out the 'Working Together' resource developed by the Kulunga Research Network: <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/our-research/early-environment/developmental-origins-of-child-health/expired-projects/working-together-second-edition/>

Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO) and Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATA) play an important role in growing your understanding, as they can help bridge the gap between educators and community members. Working in partnership with AIEOs and ATAs will give you insight about when to involve a student's support network and bring in other agencies and informal supports.

It's important to create a space to notice when things have changed for a child or young person and have established relationships where you as an educator can speak openly with students, their caregivers and their family.

*“For too long, I think, we've looked at mental health as an issue that there's something wrong with you. It's not about that...particularly working with young people, how do we change that stigma attached to mental health? How do we promote healthy support-seeking behaviours by really enforcing that mental health is not a bad thing?”*  
- Kimberley Aboriginal youth worker

Aboriginal children may be reluctant to talk about things that are worrying them, due to ingrained concerns about the shame and stigma of 'mental health issues' and fear that others in their close-knit community will hear about them. It may be a more helpful approach to focus more on their social and emotional wellbeing.



If you are concerned about a child, you can download the Behaviour, Emotions, Thoughts, Learning and Social Relationships (BETLS) Observation Tool from the Be You website to record observations: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/betls-observation-tool>. You can also check out 'Wellbeing Tools for Students' on the Be You website: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-students>, which includes helpful links and resources for children and young people.

When engaging families and caregivers, it's important to note that they may have barriers to entering a school or talking to educators. This could be for a range of reasons. Some Aboriginal people may mistrust schools, seeing them as symbols of colonisation and assimilation. Some traditional desert men may see schools as a women and children's space.

Family members and caregivers may feel unwelcome due to their own school experiences or the behaviour of previous educators in your learning community. For example, 'fly in, fly out' educators who didn't engage with the community, ones who demanded respect without earning it or who treated family members as ignorant.

*“When I walk in there, I feel like I'm back at school going to the principal's office. So, you know, if your schooling wasn't a great time in your life then that's bringing up a lot of things as well.”*  
- NDIS support worker

This is why it's vital to work with AIEOs and ATAs to make your learning community a welcoming and culturally inclusive space. The 'Provide flexible, culturally responsive education' and 'Cultural Actions' sections of this resource will help you do this. For more information about communicating effectively, check out the Be You Fact Sheet 'Communication skills for educators' here: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/relationships/communication-skills-for-educators>

Work from a place of knowing that everyone wants the best for children and young people to live happy, healthy and safe lives.

Where meaningful relationships, based on mutual respect and understanding, are created between educators and children – and their caregivers, family and community – the students will be more likely to open up to educators about things that are worrying them.

*“Teach them about their feelings and making sure they got someone to talk to ... it's OK to seek help.”*  
- Community member





Please see page 64 for video transcript

# Provide flexible, culturally responsive education

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As an educator, you already know you need to create flexible, accessible learning opportunities built on the experiences of the children in your classroom. In the Pilbara and Kimberley, this means developing a culturally responsive education in which you actively work to "make connections between each student's home and school experiences, and use a range of learning opportunities that make schooling more effective for Aboriginal students" (Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework, 2015).

As outlined in previous sections of this resource, generations of Aboriginal children – particularly those of mixed descent – were removed from their families and placed in missions, orphanages and children's homes. This happened between 1910 and the 1970s, and these children are referred to as the Stolen Generations. The Healing Foundation's website: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/> and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies website: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/> have some information about intergenerational trauma and other impacts of colonisation and assimilation.

*“Some (of the families) been taken away, the Stolen Generation, you know, so that has a lot of effect on a lot of the people and families, as well as the kids.”*  
– Roebourne AIEO

Over time, communities have shown strength and resilience in navigating this trauma and its ongoing effects. You can assist with this healing and actively change the educational experience of Aboriginal children and young people by working with Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO), Aboriginal Teaching Assistants (ATA) and the community to make your learning space culturally safe and responsive.

*“They teach students and students/community teach them.”*  
– Aboriginal medical service CEO

Despite rising awareness, there is still a significant gap in educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. You can make a tangible difference as an educator. By inviting children and young people to share their cultures you are amplifying their voice – a way of building connections and valuing their experience. “They are teachers, also,” a Roebourne AIEO noted. Creating a supportive and inclusive learning community helps build the foundations for lifelong social and emotional wellbeing.



*“Aboriginal people across the Kimberley and Pilbara have varying degrees of cultural connectedness and words for describing their Liyan (spirit)”*  
- Community member

Your cultural awareness learning will, and should, be ongoing. Look for every opportunity to build on this so you can take what you have learnt and apply it in your classroom. You can continue your cultural awareness learning through the school, community programs and events. Speak with AIEOs, ATAs, and community members for information about the local region, such as the history, significant sites, and questions that can and can't be asked.

*“In order to understand another culture, non-Aboriginal teachers need to know their own culture first. How does their culture influence them, their thoughts and actions? Is their culture dominating and relegating Aboriginal culture to second place?”*  
- Aboriginal medical service CEO

When Aboriginal children enter their learning community they are required to code-switch. They leave their homes, where they interact and speak according to their Aboriginal cultures and backgrounds – and are disciplined differently – and switch to English to interact in a Western educational and social environment. They then switch back to Aboriginal once the school day is over. Aboriginal children are experts at code-switching, but it takes a lot out of them and requires much skill on their part.

Creating a culturally responsive classroom for Aboriginal children starts with developing two-way cultural respect, understanding their individual story and sharing your own. You'll need to be mindful of kinship obligations, avoidance relationships, physical cues – such as whether it's appropriate to make direct eye contact – and family dynamics. For example, when you're creating groups for an activity there may be some children you can't ask to work together. Another example could be the way you engage with young men who have been through initiation. You may need to adapt your interactions with them to reflect that they are now considered an adult, with adult responsibilities, in the community.

*“I used to get in trouble from teachers for not looking them in the face ... (but) when I was growing up, you know, when Elders are talking to me, I didn't look them in the face because that's respect for me to them.”*  
- Aboriginal medical service liaison officer





Please see page 65 for video transcript

The AIEO or ATA can help you navigate cultural practices. It may be useful to watch 2019 documentary *In My Blood It Runs* (<https://inmyblooditrans.com/>), which explores the challenges 10-year-old Dajuan, a child-healer, faces balancing his traditional Arrernte/Garrwa upbringing with his Western education.

Build a strong connection with the AIEO or ATA in your school. Working with them to develop engagement and learning strategies will help you do this, as they will have an understanding about what will and won't work in their community. For example, in Parnngurr, educators and students go out on Country with Martu rangers for activities such as mapping local areas, looking for and counting bilbies, tracking animals and looking for soaks (waterholes). Another example is teaching children measurements by how far they can kick a football or cast a fishing line.

You should set high expectations for all the children in your learning community, based on their individual strengths and skills, to help them reach their potential. You have a responsibility to every child to support their learning through the lens of their cultures, their background and their lived experience.

“We want to try and make these kids sort of see that they can achieve anything they put their mind to, they deserve to grab themselves a better life – they just got to be the ones to grab it.”  
- Roebourne educator

“Don't be afraid to do this.  
The power is in the team  
you create with the AIEO  
and the students”  
- Roebourne AIEO

The performance descriptions for teachers in the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework will help you identify indicators to achieve this goal. A Menzies School of Health Research review into 'Cultural Responsiveness and School Education' ([https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms\\_docs/312407\\_Cultural\\_Responsiveness\\_and\\_School\\_Education.pdf](https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/312407_Cultural_Responsiveness_and_School_Education.pdf)) also provides useful information regarding this topic. The Be You Cultural Actions Catalogue will help you find place-based, culturally responsive actions you can apply in your learning community.



As an educator, you are guided by a state curriculum. Be mindful you are bringing a Western education into a different cultural context. Aboriginal children and young people live in two worlds – they carry beliefs and cultures passed down through generations and these may not align with the Western concepts presented at school. Bridge the curriculum with the cultures, language and knowledge of the community. For example, at Fitzroy schools, children can choose – with the approval of their families or caregivers – between learning Bunuba, Walmajarri or Gooniyandi. Cable Beach and Broome primary school children learn Yawuru, while primary and secondary schools in Newman are incorporating Martu in their curriculum.

One AIEO recalled a visit to an aged care home a few years ago, when aged care workers saw a change in an elderly man who was generally very quiet and “kept to himself”: “When he heard the kids coming in to visit, he sort of sat up and he started singing a song in language to the kids.... and the kids all sat around, listening to him and then they're like, ‘Miss, what was that old fella singing about?’”

“The children are our future. If we can get them to have more belief in their culture, that will make them stronger ... and getting them to pass on that knowledge, or keeping it and passing it on, it makes them stronger with what they know.” -  
Roebourne AIEO

As you plan your lessons, continually ask yourself: “What lens am I using as I plan this lesson? Is it a culturally responsive one? How can I partner with the AIEO, or community members, to make this lesson more culturally appropriate?”

“I’ve never been told,  
or anyone in my school,  
about our black history.”  
- Roebourne AIEO

You'll need to be particularly mindful of providing an accurate view of history and geography that articulates the horrific impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal Peoples. As part of your 'walking softly', you should take the time to learn local Aboriginal history from the community and discuss how to teach it as part of your culturally responsive approach to education. Ask the AIEO or ATA you work with to support in this and reach out to community members or Elders to lead these lessons, perhaps on Country. Everyone plays a role in creating a culturally safe environment.

“This kid, you hardly get him to speak or say much, he shook me ... and told me, this tree – and he named the tree – and said what you use it for. It blew me away and I think, I know you've been listening to me. Definitely being out of the classroom settings – it gives that student something to look forward to.”  
- Roebourne AIEO

“When you're going out in Country and you're talking about stuff ... when you're connecting the language and the Country together, you know, it's making it come alive again.”  
- Roebourne AIEO

While your first preference should be to consult with AIEOs, ATAs and community members about local cultures and history, the following educational websites also have a range of useful teaching resources: [ABC Education](#), [SBS Learn](#) and [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education](#)





Please see page 66 for video transcript

## Racism and bullying

Racism can manifest itself in many ways in a learning community – including your own unconscious biases – and can have a significant impact on a child or young person’s social and emotional wellbeing.

*“Racism is not confined to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – racism is very real for fairer-skinned Aboriginal people and can leave them feeling like not belonging in either place.”*  
– Community member

It can be as overt as offensive name-calling or physical bullying based on skin tone – whether light or dark – or Language Group. Be firm that racism and bullying will not be tolerated in your learning community. Develop strategies to de-escalate conflict with the AIEO or ATA and the school’s senior staff. Be clear about the consequences of such behaviour and apply them fairly and consistently.

*“There was concern about saying a child was Aboriginal for fear of how that information might be used and whether their child would be treated differently, based on being Aboriginal.”*  
– Aboriginal medical service worker

Be wary of your own unconscious biases. These could be having low expectations or not calling on Aboriginal students because you assume they can’t answer a question, being dismissive or demeaning to an AIEO or ATA, being condescending or paternalistic towards Aboriginal children or their caregivers, or assuming particularly disruptive children are always at fault.

For example, you might have punished a child for disruptive or aggressive behaviour when they may have been responding to racist name-calling or covert bullying from a classmate. You will need to address their conduct. But reprimanding them without understanding why they were being disruptive may alienate the child, reinforcing beliefs that their perspective or wellbeing isn’t important, that they don’t belong or that the learning community – and the world in general – is inherently unjust. More importantly, this doesn’t address the racism or bullying that led to their actions. Schools are required to encourage a supportive and inclusive learning environment.



Work with the AIEO or ATA to create a space where children and young people feel comfortable to discuss racism or bullying experiences and why they may feel or behave the way they do. This is an opportunity to show you value their views and feelings. You or the AIEO may need to speak with the child or young person one-on-one, outside the classroom environment, which may make them feel more comfortable to speak freely.

For anti-racism resources you can check out the Australian Human Rights Commission's Racism. It Stops With Me campaign (<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/>), racial equality project All Together Now (<https://alltogethernow.org.au/>) or Cool Australia's lessons exploring the key themes of the Adam Goodes documentary *The Final Quarter* (<https://www.coolaustralia.org/the-final-quarter-curriculum-resources/>).

Be You has lots of resources about bullying, such as 'Recognising bullying behaviour' (<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/relationships/recognising-bullying-behaviour>) and 'What schools can do about bullying' (<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/relationships/what-schools-can-do-about-bullying>).

Be patient, be open-minded – make education a two-way learning experience for you and your students.



The image features a vibrant, abstract background. A large, dark green shape dominates the center, with a lighter green, textured area to its right. Concentric circles in various colors (red, white, blue, green) are scattered throughout, some appearing as if drawn with a marker. Organic, hand-drawn shapes in red, orange, and grey are also present, creating a sense of movement and cultural expression.

# Cultural Actions



Scroll through the suggested actions below and consider whether they can be adapted or contextualised for your learning community and included in your Be You Action Plan.

## How can these actions be most effective?

We encourage you to consider the following steps to help increase the effectiveness of whole-setting actions:

- Consult with members of the learning community, particularly Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers or Aboriginal Teaching Assistants, to develop and agree on the best approach. You could also seek input from the wider community, including Elders, families or caregivers, health and community services.
- Tailor actions to meet the needs of your learning community. For example, modify or contextualise actions to suit the age and demographics of the children or young people in your care.
- Regularly review and revisit actions to check their effectiveness and to drive continuous improvement.

# Walk softly

- Introduce yourself to families and caregivers in a way that's meaningful – allow yourself to be guided by the AIEOs/ ATAs to identify the most appropriate way to do this.
- While maintaining a work-life balance, be open to proactively take part in wider community events and programs that operate outside of school hours, such as youth programs and sporting events. Interschool sporting carnivals, such as basketball competitions/football camps, and youth leadership camps provide an opportunity for connection outside the classroom.
- Be willing to meet with families in informal settings outside the school or where they feel most comfortable.
- Engage with AIEOs/ATAs on a regular basis to keep informed of any significant events occurring and the potential impact of these on the classroom environment.
- Protocols concerning engaging with community members during sorry business/sorry time may vary from location to location, never assume that you know the culturally responsive way to interact, always ask.
- When making enquiries about a child or young person's welfare, ask "what's happening for you?" Don't make assumptions or ask leading questions.
- Undertake ongoing cultural awareness training specific to the community and prior to engagement with families, caregivers and students, if possible.
- Be aware of your own unconscious biases and how they may affect your interactions and decisions.
- Support boys to identify the person/people they feel comfortable speaking with about their social and emotional wellbeing.
- Engage with local initiatives and organisations working collaboratively with youth promoting healthy social and emotional wellbeing practices.
- Endeavour to better understand the local history of the community if cultural awareness training is unavailable.



# Identify and build connections

- Work with the students to identify who they are, where they come from and how they see themselves in the world. This will support students to feel seen as a whole individual.
- Use photographs and multimedia to share family relationships, interests, places visited, or favourite sporting teams to invite connection.
- Facilitate lessons outside the school walls in spaces where community members are present and where experiential learning can take place. This could include working on a project with local councils, where students map out a piece of land, plan for a park that they would like to see created on this space and have these proposals considered by the council. Students could then work as a group on the winning proposal.
- Encourage Elders to come into the learning community and participate in cultural activities within the school. This could include leading days of significance, storytelling, and smoking ceremonies.
- Develop ongoing communication strategies with caregivers and families, that focus on the positive activities in the classroom. This could include monthly catch-up conversations, emails or text messages to the caregivers and families.
- Send a monthly newsletter by email and hard copy, to caregivers and families, including videos and photos showing class activities and highlighting class achievements.
- Create a buddy bench or friendship chair that encourages students to connect with others in the playground.
- Schedule regular home visits, where appropriate. These visits should focus on the achievements and efforts of the child or young person, rather than behaviour and results alone. Home visits can support building strong relationships with families and caregivers.
- As shame can be a significant barrier to a student's personal growth, create a process which allows children or young people to ask for help within the classroom in an inconspicuous way. This might include placing an object on their desk to alert the educator they need help.

# Identify and build connections

- Enquire if there are local community members willing and able to perform a smoking ceremony at the start of the school year or term, and ask families to join. For many Aboriginal people smoking ceremonies can help to cleanse an environment or in certain locations, to welcome people to a space.
- Recognise days of local and national significance including the Pilbara Strike, NAIDOC Week, Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week. This could include having an event or an art competition.
- Create a term calendar of cultural events, activities and seasons and display it in the classroom. There are six seasons in the Kimberley. You could also promote an existing Aboriginal seasons calendar that depicts the local weather patterns, flora and fauna availability as well as traditional ecological knowledge.
- Establish positive relationships and praise when you see children or young people, their families and caregivers in an informal setting outside the school environment.
- Approach community Elders to provide cultural supervision for AIEOs and ATAs.
- Actively involve caregivers or family members in the decision-making process for any matter relating to the child or young person. Fostering the student's social and emotional wellbeing should be a team effort.
- Include community members in storytelling activities with staff and students offering both traditional and more modern stories promoting local Aboriginal cultures. This may include reading stories in local languages to promote a bilingual environment.
- Determine a shared contextualised, culturally responsive understanding of what social and emotional wellbeing means within the school and community.
- Invite the community to special events or celebrations within the learning environment. An example of a special event is the Pilbara Fashion Show.
- Support young people to seek out and engage in opportunities outside school, for example, job interviews, life skills, art exhibitions, scholarships.
- Create an induction/familiarisation package for new families when they enrol their first child.

# Identify and build connections

- Be approachable. Families or caregivers may not want to book an appointment to talk, preferring less formal engagement. Non-confrontational questions like “Are you doing anything?” “Is it ok if ..?” “Are you busy later?” help set this space in a culturally responsive manner.
- Take the time to build a relationship with AIEOs/ATAs, recognise the value they bring into the school and the knowledge of the community they hold. Don’t talk down to them - make them the cup of tea!
- If a child or young person engages you in a confidential conversation, you need to ensure they understand you can’t maintain confidentiality if they are at risk. You must document the conversation if there is a perceived risk.
- Encourage mum and bubs playgroups to come into the learning community to build relationships.
- Promote special events at the school through flyers, on noticeboards and word-of-mouth.
- Consider incorporating community-led programs and incentives designed to encourage positive school attendance.
- Organise/attend events where students and families can meet with health care service providers and collectively discuss issues that can affect a young person’s wellbeing.
- Attend the annual Reconciliation Ball or family fun day, hosted by the Shire of East Pilbara during Reconciliation Week.
- Attend Elders’ birthday celebrations in Roebourne.
- Attend Martu community events.
- Volunteer with the YMCA Remote Schools Attendance Strategy buses in Newman.
- Create an Aboriginal Educators Cultural Group within schools and communities who can work with Elders to promote Aboriginality and cultural recognition within their learning space.
- Host a disco for all students in a region/learning cluster to come together.
- Assess the preferred and most effective ways to engage with different families and caregivers. This may be through texting, a newsletter or a face-to-face conversation.
- Organise community fundraising events, such as family fun days, to raise money for school excursions and/or equipment.

# Provide flexible, culturally responsive education

- Form networks with educators, AIEOs and ATAs from other schools to gain an understanding of their communities, share similarities and differences. This allows everyone to share knowledge and activity ideas - not only ideas that have been tried and were successful, but also those that haven't worked.
- Incorporate local Aboriginal history in lessons. This can be achieved by working with AIEOs and ATAs to identify the local holders of this knowledge and who in the community would be best placed to lead these lessons or assist with discussions. Suggested sources include local Native Title Bodies, Prescribed Body Corporates or other Traditional Owner groups.
- Develop projects with students to celebrate and better understand their cultures and history with the class. This doesn't have to be limited to paper-based projects. It could be a photography or oral history project where students learn about their history from their Elders and create a PowerPoint presentation, which they present to the class.
- Cultural excursions including trips on Country, camping, fishing and hunting all encourage intergenerational knowledge translation when actively engaging with Elders, AIEOs/ATAs and rangers. This can help you identify significant sites in the region. It could also be an opportunity to build connections with families or caregivers, who could be approached to volunteer for these excursions.
- Establish a healthy cooking and gardening program incorporating traditional Indigenous foods and plants. Get the local rangers to support this work and share their knowledge, which could include foraging excursions. In some places, like One Arm Point Remote Community School, EON Foundation has worked with classes to share knowledge about Bardi seasons, such as the best times to plant and harvest crops and when to eat certain animals to ensure they don't become extinct. This has enabled educators and students to plant and maintain a healthy fruit and vegetable garden in accordance with the traditional Bardi seasonal calendar.
- Engage knowledgeable community members to lead bush medicine workshops, including collecting materials and making medicines. This activity enables knowledge to be passed between generations and strengthens connections between children or young people and the older people in their community. You could also include learning about traditional Aboriginal medicine and ecological knowledge in science classes.



# Provide flexible, culturally responsive education

- Use 50words.online (website) to incorporate local language into the classroom which could include signs and learning areas. This activity enables students to become the educators, highlighting how, in different contexts, people's roles can change. At One Arm Point and Jigalong Remote Community schools, Bardi, Martu and English are included on signs in classrooms and around the school. This allows students to feel as though their identity is recognised and celebrated.
- Name each classroom after an animal or season in the appropriate language, in consultation with the local language centre or Traditional Owner group.
- Teach the local and English names of sites/towns/items/activities in the community. This activity could also include an excursion around the community where students map out the areas, then name them in the local language and in English. This incorporates various curricula in one activity and allows students to be the holders of knowledge and the educators to learn from them.
- Incorporate a structured local language lesson in the classroom. At Roebourne School, some of the AIEOs run a cultural class and teach language to the students. This activity builds capacity and confidence for the AIEO staff while also reminding students that their local language is valued.
- Engage community members to teach language for different classes, such as music, art and language classes, based on their strengths, interests and skill sets.
- Run a classroom art exhibition where the children can display art they have made that represents their culture or the Land, and invite community members to attend.
- Determine a common language or visual representations for emotions, including non-verbal communication, that allows children to self-select how they are feeling. For example, thumbs up, halfway or thumbs down.
- Use the Be You Feeling Cards to encourage conversation with children and young people.
- Actively promote the use and active engagement with Aboriginal authors and books in the classroom and at home. For more information visit: <https://www.indigenouliteracyfoundation.org.au/>
- Be aware of the influence that the physical environment can have on students who have been exposed to trauma. Create spaces that promote different energy levels, balancing spaces for calm and high energy levels.



# Provide flexible, culturally responsive education

- Establish classroom principles and learning foundations with AIEOs/ATAs. These could include learning principles that include the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- Encourage children and young people to identify and talk about their role models. You could create role model wall or run a show and tell.
- Learning communities in urban areas can establish connections with the Land by exploring the local national parks through a cultural lens with Aboriginal Park Rangers.
- Develop an Acknowledgement of Country protocol and policy, which is school and classroom specific. Have an acknowledgement in class each morning and ask students to take turns in sharing why this is important and what it means to them personally.
- Work with the AIEO/ATA, families or caregivers to learn about family structures, avoidance relationships and kinship obligations in the community. Consider these relationships before planning an event or seating arrangements in classroom.
- Create a leadership program, within the classroom or school, that supports inclusive and responsive learning where students competent in their language are encouraged to help others learn.
- Create personalised learning strategies and emotional de-escalation activities that actively include the caregivers and work with the families' identified strengths.
- Develop lesson plans with the AIEOs/ATAs that can be used for children across a range of developmental ages and capabilities.
- Share lesson plans with the caregivers and families in a way that is easy for them to understand and encourages feedback.
- Establish a sensory box within the classroom.
- With help from AIEOs/ATAs and community members create a list of local language swear words that's available to new education staff, to best restrict use of these words in the classroom.
- Actively include children or young people in decision-making processes to determine the type and location of culturally responsive activities.



# Provide flexible, culturally responsive education

- Have a clear, fair, consistent and transparent response to racism and subsequent bullying incidents (physical, verbal, online) specific to your community for educators, AIEOs/ ATAs and school support officers to use. You'll find anti-racism resources listed in the 'Provide flexible, culturally responsive education' section of this resource.
- Display the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Map of Indigenous Australia in the classroom and encourage students to identify Language Groups known to them. It can be found here: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/>
- Greet children, young people, families and caregivers at the school drop-off or pick-up in local language. You can also promote local language through 'word of the week' activities.
- Engage children and young people in intergenerational learning and modelling respectful relationships by visiting Elders in nursing homes and making connections.
- Engage children and young people in learning and singing songs with Elders. Make sure you consider cultural sensitivities and protocols.
- Invite Aboriginal artists to encourage students to create their own culturally meaningful art that can be displayed in the classroom. Incorporate Bronwyn Bancroft's *The Art in Country* book in your art class and discuss the significance of shapes, colours and patterns of Country. You could also work with a local art centre to engage children and young people in making natural pigments, such as ochre.
- ANZAC Day activity – read *Alfred's War* by Rachel Bin Salleh, which explores roles and perspectives of Aboriginal soldiers during World War I.
- Reinforce the importance of language in the classroom and create an open space where children can express themselves in a language of their choice.
- Create lessons that explore the history of colonisation from an Aboriginal perspective to better understand its ongoing impacts.
- Display culturally appropriate artifacts/artwork around the school. Discuss how to do this appropriately with AIEOs/ ATAs and community members.
- Provide opportunities for intergenerational learning where Elders are invited into schools and tell their stories to younger generations. This could include conducting activities on Country that they engaged in when they were children, such as looking for goannas in Jigalong.



# Provide flexible, culturally responsive education

- Work with Aboriginal health care services, offering them the chance to come into the learning community to talk about relevant topics such as bullying, anxiety and social and emotional wellbeing.
- Encourage learning in different spaces, both indoors and outdoors.
- Invite Aboriginal LGBTQIA+ speakers to the school to talk to young people about celebrating diversity, promoting inclusion, encouraging belonging and creating a safe space.
- Establish an 'Australian animal of the month' calendar and discuss the stories and cultural significance of the animal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Engage a community member to teach traditional weaving, enabling the class to make wearable art.
- Include traditional Aboriginal instruments in music class and engage a community member to discuss the significance of instruments, including how they're made and when they're used.
- Ask the AIEO or ATA to teach students Aboriginal symbols to incorporate in writing, drawing and storytelling.
- Engage with the artist of your learning community's Reconciliation Action Plan artwork to discuss the significance and connection of the artwork to your setting.
- Encourage the students to take part in yarning circles to share their ideas and thoughts throughout the day. Ask the AIEO/ATA to lead the yarning circle.
- Explore Songlines and Dreamtime stories by inviting Elders to share their knowledge and reflections of these.
- Teach about significant social activism of leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors. This could include Truganini, Mabo or Vincent Lingiari.
- Discuss David Unaipon's achievements and why he is on the Australian \$50 (fifty dollar) note.
- Discuss the music of Archie Roach, including the song *Took the Children Away*.
- Discuss the journey towards the 1967 referendum and what impact that had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Use the ABC's 'Right Wrongs' resource to discuss social change and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civil rights movement. You can find it here: <https://www.abc.net.au/rightwrongs/>



# Provide flexible, culturally responsive education

- Discuss Reconciliation Week, including what it aims to do and how the learning community can get involved in developing their Reconciliation Action Plan. Read *Say Yes* by Jennifer Castles to unpack the meaning of Reconciliation Week and ask questions such as “What does reconciliation mean to me?”
- Discuss Native Title, Traditional Land Ownership and the impact of the Mabo case in your geography class.
- Read *Sorry Day* by Coral Vass and Dub Leffler to acknowledge National Sorry Day on 26 May.
- Engage in natural play by exploring different natural materials sourced from the local area. Work with a local ranger to explain what natural resources are available in your local area, including native seeds and where they can be planted in a learning setting.
- Work with the AIEO/ATA to embed the 8 Aboriginal ways of learning in your classroom.
- Read Bruce Pascoe’s *Young Dark Emu* to engage local ways of knowing and being with Country from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.
- Work with community groups to do an on Country clean-up day.
- Display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags in your classroom and discuss the meaning of the colours and symbols.
- Discuss the significance of the 1946 Pilbara Strike, which lasted until 1949, when hundreds of Aboriginal pastoral workers walked off the job for better pay and conditions.
- Run a competition for each classroom where students collaborate on an artwork that relates to the NAIDOC theme for the year. Encourage students to research the theme, Aboriginal art styles and to work together to map and develop a piece that will be presented to the rest of the school and community members. Elders could be invited to the reveal ceremony and be on the judging panel to choose the winning artwork.
- Organise a NAIDOC ball for all students to attend. Here you can raise the profile of your local Aboriginal students by encouraging them to share stories, cultural dances and food with other students. To ensure all students are comfortable to attend, educators should seek to have shoes and formal wear donated for students who may not be able to obtain these. Engage service providers and Aboriginal Medical Services to support the event. You could also ensure students’ families, Elders and community members are invited.



# Glossary

**Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO)** – an Aboriginal staff member in a learning community employed to support Aboriginal students, promote cultural and inclusive practices and act as a liaison between the school and the community.

**Aboriginal Teaching Assistant (ATA)** – an Aboriginal staff member, usually in a Catholic school, who plays a similar role to an AIEO.

**Be You** – a national mental health in education initiative, delivered by Beyond Blue, Early Childhood Australia and headspace. Be You’s vision is for every learning community to be positive, inclusive and resilient.

**BETLS Observational Tool** – a Be You template for documenting observations about a child or young person. BETLS stands for behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning and social relationships. You can find out more about it and how to use it here: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/betls-observation-tool>

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**Code-switching** – the process of changing one’s behaviour, particularly language used, to suit any given context.

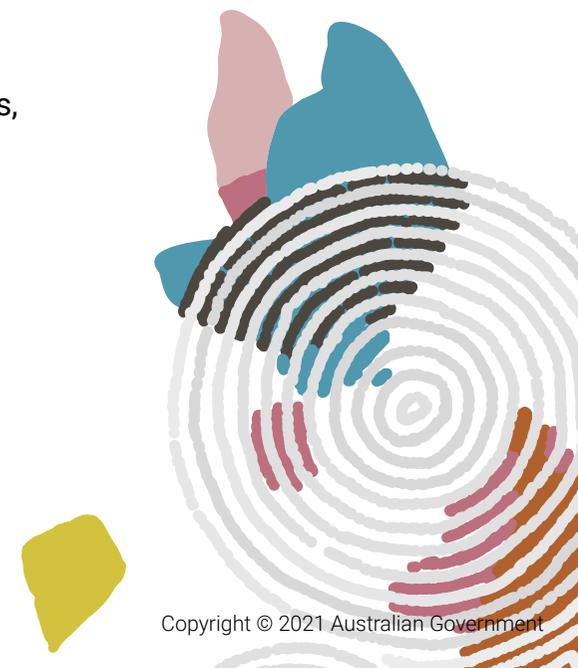
**Community council** – representative group of community members.

**Country** – Aboriginal Peoples talk about Country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to Country, sing to Country, visit Country, worry about Country etc. Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, but a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life.

**Cultural Actions Catalogue** – a planning and implementation tool that identifies quick wins and longer-term actions, and helps you adapt activities relevant to a specific learning community.

**Cultural Advisor** – an Aboriginal person who provides cultural support for Aboriginal people and helps non-Aboriginal people improve their understanding to create culturally safe and welcoming environments.

**Education Assistant (EA)** – a teaching aide who provides classroom support to the educator and students, sometimes directly assisting children or young people with additional needs.



**Educator** – a staff member working in an early learning service or school, whose role is to educate children or young people.

**Inclusion** – for Be You, inclusion is about ensuring opportunity for everyone to be who they are and achieve their best social and emotional wellbeing.

**Kinship** – a feature of Aboriginal social organisation and family relationships, kinship is a complex system that determines how people relate to each other and their roles, responsibilities in relation to one another, ceremonial business and Land. This system determines who marries who, ceremonial relationships, funeral roles and behaviour patterns with other kin.

**Learning community** – an early learning service or school.

**Liyan or Mabu Liyan** – a Yawuru concept, which is difficult to explain in English. It describes and recognises the continued connection between the mind, body, spirit, cultures and the Land. It also encapsulates family, community and what gives meaning to one's life. Mabu Liyan describes the essence of what it is to have and to know a good life.

**Martu** – a grouping of several Aboriginal Peoples in the Western Desert, comprising five Language Groups: Mandjildjara, Kartudjara, Keiadjara, Putidjara and Wanman.

**Natural helper** – a key community member who people turn to for advice.

**Ranger** – an Aboriginal person employed to protect native plants and animals, maintain cultural sites, reduce wildfires and control feral animals and invasive weeds. They combine traditional knowledge with modern techniques to protect Land and sea.

**Unconscious bias** – a social stereotype about a certain group (such as a racial or identity group) you have formed outside your own conscious awareness.





*“I think it’s really important for educators to really build positive relationships with parents, children and community, because it actually encourages, active participation in that space.”*

It promotes a sense of ownership within the parents to be actively involved in their children’s education and development. I think it’s really important to build those positive relationships with communities, with parents and with children, because when you’re looking at it from a cultural context, the community takes a, quite a lead role in rearing up children.

The AIEOs know the structures of our families. They know the vulnerabilities of each child. They understand the community dynamics. So when there are issues that are going to arise in community, these should be the first point of contact for the schools to really encourage active participation of the community.

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The parents can be engaged quite proactively to encourage the kids to actively participate in education. And then if there are barriers to learning for the child, they actually have a quite a big group of people to discuss those barriers with. And they can actually put quite a clear plan for this young person to be more engaged with education. So when you’re looking at range of programs in local Indigenous communities, such as One Arm Point, which is a Bardi Traditional Owner group they have activities outside of the school where kids are actively promoted to attend.

It’s about open communication channels. I feel being transparent and open the community around the actual barriers that you’re experiencing as educators, encouraging whether it be parent teacher meetings, encouraging young kids to play an active role in regards to what they feel is important to them and their learning. You’re really taking into context the language barriers that might exist there also the traditional cultural barriers that might exist and really utilising the AIEOs to actually inform how that is done in a culturally appropriate way.

So if the school was to piggyback on top of those already existing programs, it actually builds greater outcomes for kids to learn and develop in a culturally safe way. But also they’re getting those educational outcomes, whether that be in maths or science, marine science is something that’s promoted in the Bardi area. So how do we actively include young people in that space? I would strongly encourage that the schools really use the AIEOs as a tool to really engage community participation.

I think you need to allow time for you to develop in that space, but be respectful as well, and really learn from the experts. And I think AIEOs are the experts in that field and really allow yourself to partner with them.”





*“We welcome the children in. We make sure it’s a welcoming space so that kids will come in and want to stay in the classroom. So when we’ve created that space, I sit with them and we have activities happening.”*

When I’m in the class with the students, they see an Aboriginal person and a non-Aboriginal person in the classroom and they, you know, feel “Oh, yes, it’s okay for me to come in and stay in the classroom.” So when I’m bridging the gap from school to community, one of the things that we do, we go out and we visit, have a home visit with the parents if the kids haven’t been turning up for school. And then we invite community Elders to come and join in our celebrations like NAIDOC and they share their stories and they tell their stories. And the kids, yeah, they love it.

They love having community people come in. That makes a whole lot of differences because then the kids are seeing, “Oh yeah we’ve still got Elders, and we can listen to their stories and hear their stories.”

At the moment, our language is on the endangered list because there’s hardly strong speakers like our Elders were. And I reckon it’s very important for children to learn both ways. Learning their first language, and then learning the non-Ngaarda way, how to read and to write. I think it is very important for the teachers to know and to have this cultural awareness training, because most of the people that haven’t had cultural awareness they only think, “Oh yes, that’s an Aboriginal person.” They think we are all the same. It helps them to understand.

Like during our law ceremonies, some of our high school students will be taken out of the high school and going through law. So the teachers should be made aware of all these things that are happening with the, in the Ngaarda people’s history. So I think it’s very important for them to have cultural awareness, right from the beginning, like when they are going, coming out of teaching college, that’s what they should have.





*“As an educator, I’ve practised walking softly in my teaching career with children.”*

And this means taking the time to actually look at the children, listen to the children, take time to step back and allow the child to actually enter your space when they are ready to enter your space. It’s not about moulding that space to suit you. It’s about you opening up the space to allow that child to enter into your realm. It’s about having a calm presence. It’s listening to that child, looking at the child, connecting with that child. And I think that’s very important in education to be able to walk softly so that you’re engaging with the child and the child knows that they can actually trust you.

Teaching is about including the world of the child into the classroom. It’s not the classroom sitting there and waiting for the community, the family and the child to fit into it. The teacher has to be able to walk softly within the community. Go and see the families, listen to the families, find out what is important to the family and to the community. In that way, they can then engage with the child and include a culturally sensitive program into the classroom where the child feels that they have a space and a place to learn.

To be able to bring the Aboriginal child into the classroom or for staff to be culturally inclusive, not only in the classroom, but in the whole school environment, it’s critical that teachers get to know themselves. They have to unpack who they are as a person. In that way, they’re able then to understand other cultures, particularly Aboriginal culture.

And by doing that, the teacher then is able to be flexible, accommodating, and will also value Aboriginal culture and work with what is important in Aboriginal culture to be able to create that culturally inclusive environment in the classroom. We do have a lot of Aboriginal children, who are experiencing trauma. And it’s a difficult situation for that child. It’s a difficult situation for the teacher. It’s not an easy thing. What’s happened is, and we’ve heard lots about trans-generational trauma, inter-generational trauma, but it is a reality. We have now the impact of those Stolen Generations still out there in our community.



We have families who are not coping, cannot deal with a lot of things because there's a lot of pressure. So, teachers are dealing with the after-effects of all these things. So the teacher needs to become fully aware of what is meant by inter-generational trauma, trans-generational trauma, and how does it impact on the children in my classroom? And where do I go to seek support and advice to help that child? Because the teacher can't do it. It's now a holistic approach.

You need to engage with health. You need to engage with cultural Elders. You need to be able to work with programs that are going to support the family. The teacher's role is not just in the classroom. You have a child that you're going to be working with for the whole school year. So it means that you have to work out, how do I support this child in my classroom? A key part of the process of understanding, and I would say embracing, the child that is experiencing trauma is working with all the assets that are in the school as well.

For example, the Aboriginal and Islander Education workers in schools, the teaching assistants in schools, their roles are critical because they come from local families. They see those local families. They talk with the local families. The children know them. They're trusted. They're respected. So the teacher must be working with those professional staff in the schools to work out, how do I support this child? And having been an Aboriginal teaching assistant way back when I started in 1978, I can tell you that it actually works. So they are there to support you. But you have to also reach out. Don't expect them to come to you all the time. You have to reach out to them."





*“It’s really important to build that rapport, not just with the kids, but the community as well, because if you don’t have that connection, or that trust and it comes down to trust, then a lot of people in communities will just see you as another agency coming through.”*

When you’re new, starting out in these communities, with the family, with the youth, really important if they give you an open invitation to hunting or fishing, just to be involved with community events, take up people on their invitation and just be part of the community.

So there’s a different make-up within all the different schools in this region, anyway. So, a lot of youth have been more connected when they’re in bilingual schools, with their own language and their own teachers, and their own people teaching them language. They also learn English and other things, but they respond more to when the local tongue is taught to them.

The connection you build with youth and the community, it’s really important because, you’ve got to build rapport with the kids, with the youth, with the community members, otherwise it won’t work. But the way you build it is through those invitations people give out to you.

The difference it makes is that maybe the next day or the next week, that child might’ve come into the class and you might meet his family, you might meet their family somewhere. And that’s when you become more immersed in what you’re doing, within the community’s culture. In schools around this region it’s sort of a different make-up because most of them are community owned. And it’s not just a state, Jigalong is a state school. We’ve got public schools here in Newman. But out in the communities they’re more independent schools.





“There are a number of roles you could say we do in the school, that encompasses the whole AIEO role. In a classroom itself, we support mainly the student in the classroom, with their learning.

For example, I've been following a student that is struggling with English and literacy and numeracy stuff. So, I follow that student right through and help them with doing the work, basically understanding and being able to do the work. I support the teacher in a way as well, with trying to encourage students to stay on task and encourage them to understand what they're learning, to stay focused with their learning and basically try and explain to them the importance of getting an education and being able to focus on their learning.

Outside of the classroom, in the school environment, we are pretty much involved in organising events, special events at the school. Coming up now is Reconciliation Day. So, we're looking to plan a Reconciliation Day. NAIDOC Week, we'll be celebrating NAIDOC Week at the end of the term. We normally celebrate at term two, every year.

Outside of the school, I've been involved in the past, in the junior basketball program that used to happen on Monday afternoons and evenings. During the regular basketball season, they have their seniors on the same night and the juniors start before that. So, we go down to the courts, to the rec centre and help out with the umpiring.

We have a good, basically a very good understanding of the student's family and their family links, their extended family links, their cultural background, where they're from, whether they be from a certain Language Group or a certain cultural group, what sort of practices they have, especially when it comes to aspects of culture, like sorry time; when there's been a death in a family, of students families, close families, because with Aboriginal students, all family is close, close family to them.

Educators are like, as with the teachers, I suppose, they have their duty of care to check with their students. They discuss issues that are affecting the school and especially the kids. We have an input and then they respect that, but inside, in the classroom itself, team-teaching, working together as a team. If they're teaching something, then in the past, I've had a teacher work with me and ask me to have an input into giving different examples or different ways of putting what he's saying. So working like that, in a classroom with everything, with the teacher, is a good example of that.



A positive impact that a AIEO would have on the classroom environment, is basically your presence there. Knowing that they have someone from their culture in the class, someone that they can relate to, if they do have any issues, that they can talk to. So, if there's a problem that does come up, then I would go and deal with it. You know, being the first point of call.

Being related to most students that do come to the school, I pretty basically know all the students' families. I have a good understanding, good knowledge of who they are. And you know, their background. Even at a place, like Mowanjum that people don't understand, they don't know that I've got families out there and I do tell them that and some of them get surprised. And when you tell them this, they react to you in a in a certain way, in a more, in a really good way.





“My role as a AIEO is to be able to bring teaching on what we’ve known and being here as a two-way learning within the education side as well as for us on the cultural awareness and our governance.”

We like to tell our history of what our people used to do and working within the stations with the squatters, because I feel that those histories haven’t been told in the school apart from Captain Cook was the founder of Australia. It’s about our people because we were the first real people of Australia, of this whole continent.

From our own governance and our constitutions and our policies and procedures that we’ve had, we’ve maintained that here first before Federal Government constitution that landed here in Australia. History has never been told for our people. So coming into the school to teach our children, it’s really about lifestyle and living skills that we have. We have survived in here, within Australia, and teaching them, going back onto Country.

Even though that we’re learning on a two-way system, with the Western eyes and English standard, but it’s to also know their language and write it in their language and their history.

Most of the population in the school are Aboriginal. So I guess that it came to knowing that our Elders first came here. Telling the headmaster at that time, we want to come in and teach our children about our governance and about how that we survive on this Country.

Even though our languages and our stories and things that have been written on rock carvings, you won’t find it on Google or on a website. It’s just hearing and visualising and seeing that hands-on practice. It’s going out on Country and showing the children, even though it’s a two-way learning, if we put things into languages of something that we identify, like for instance bread. So we’d say bread, we’d say “martimirri” and other languages. So it’s meaning the same thing. So we’re trying to bring that language back into the school as well as to write it.

It makes them feel that where they belong and where their ground roots are and what Country they’re from. Because within those named title claimants, that we’ve now officially put it in through the federal courts, is being recognised and coming back into the first real people are the owners of the continent of Australia. Because there’s 375 languages in Australia. So we’re basically bringing back having our teachers, AIEOs back in and teaching our language because before it gets lost and not only that, it was here first.”





*“When people come in, the kids have to build relationships with people. Building those relationships take time and if they don’t have an understanding of what the environment of the child’s like, they’re not going to be able to make those connections.”*

Have an understanding of the area that they work in, the cultural issues or cultural demands that the families in that area have. Those kids aren’t able to build that relationship or connection with that teacher. They generally won’t make that effort to get to know that person. If you don’t take time to understand, you’re not going to get the best out of the children.

I think they should be informed before they come up this way. I think that’s a responsibility, the role the school should take, to provide them with an information packet of the area that they live in, and understand that these kids walk in two worlds.

Having their cultural responsibilities, responsibilities to family, to go to funerals, and to go to cultural business, but understand that they’re learning how to do other things, like going to school.

This generation of children are about technology and integrating that into their education. I think if you get involved in that, you’re going to get more enthusiasm from the kids, you’re going to get more involvement, and they’re going to be excited about going to school.

Educators need to understand that it doesn’t all fit in one box, we’re not all the same. And if you’re going to come up this way, then it needs to be taught our way up this way. To get the most out of the kids, you need to have community engagement and those relationships take time to build over time.





“As an AIEO, that’s a Aboriginal Education Officer here in the school, we create space for kids by being here and greeting them in the morning when they come in, so they’ve got someone who they know that is here.

Well, the teacher is there to teach the Standard Australian English, my role there is to support the child, and the teacher as well, but to make it clearer for the kid to understand what the teacher is saying by using their home language.

A day in the school for me here at the Roebourne District High School is a very busy, a very busy day. Being on time, I guess, and showing kids good work ethics, you know, when you come in to school so that they can see “Oh, she’s on time”, and teaching them to be nice to each other, to be able to get on with each other as a family and as people that have got to come and share the one space. We’re all coming here to learn, so that’s one of the things we want to teach the kids. We come to learn here.

We bridge the gap between the school and community by going out to see the caregiver or the parents about what’s happening with the child at school. We don’t want to just go out there and approach the parents every time they’re doing something that’s terrible or bad, that they’ve been fighting or swearing or throwing stuff around in the school.

We want to go out to the parents and say, “Oh this is what your child done today.” “They wrote a full sentence with all the punctuation marks”, or “They said nice things to somebody”. I think it’s very important that the kids are learning language and Aboriginal language, whether it’s Yijibarni or whether it’s another language that they learn.

When we go out onto Country, and if you can’t talk in language or understand some things in language, then you won’t be able to communicate with the Country. Because you know, when you got out there, you got to learn how to talk in language. An AIEO is very important in a classroom, so they’re still acting as that link between home and school. If they find it hard to talk to the teacher, then they can talk to the AIEO. They’ll understand better with what the child’s going through.

I am well-known in this community. I was born here. I was raised up here. I’ve worked in the school now for a while and the little silver car that I drive, all the kids know my little car. When I drive past and they’re waving at me, and if I’m driving past and I don’t wave at them then they’ll pull me up and they say, “Ms. Cheedy you didn’t wave at me, you drove past me, you didn’t wave at me.” I said, “Oh, gosh, sorry, next time I’ll wave!”





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