

# Culturally Nourishing Schooling



CULTURALLY  
NOURISHING  
SCHOOLING





We acknowledge the generous contributions from our funders that enable the team to undertake whole-of-school reform work.

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*The Culturally Nourishing Schooling (CNS) project acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters of the Australian continent and surrounding Islands.*

*We value and celebrate their continuing connection to Country, Community, and culture.*

*We pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and recognise their contribution to this land, to Indigenous education, and Australian society.*



#### 4. **Title:** Reframing a relational pedagogy to re-orient teachers' classroom practices.

##### **Abstract**

The CNS project supports schools to establish a broad whole-school reform program to affect a socio-cultural environment that engages and supports First Nations students' Indigenous identities while also meeting the educational aspirations of students, families, and communities. Each year, a cohort of teachers are systematically supported to iteratively, reconsider, reconceptualise and reframe their understanding of first Nations peoples and their endearing connections to country. Additionally, the program supports teachers to understand how their relationships with First Nations people are intimately linked to their understanding of their histories, cultures, and aspirations, and how these relate to their epistemic connection to curriculum disciplinarity, and its consequent impact on their pedagogical and assessment practices. In line with the focused CNS strategies, the project developed a critically informed pedagogic framework to support teachers to simultaneously critically interrogate their pedagogical practices through developing teaching practices that also build deep epistemic engagement with key elements of the CNS pedagogical framework. The paper will initially focus on its conceptual framing, how it has been enlisted to support teachers to affect pedagogic changes in practice and content. The last element of the paper will use teacher evidence of a re-orientation in their pedagogy through a deeper understanding of these culturally responsive framing practices.

##### **Overview**

The paper frames what we hope will be the core elements of the CNS pedagogy. The ecology of the five elements at the heart of the framework were derived from the fundamental principles set out in the paper by *Lowe, Skrebneva, Burgess, Harrison & Vass (2020)*, which laid out what the authors argued were the core constituent concepts of the project. The conceptual principles of this pivotal paper were established on the back of the empirical research undertaken by the *Aboriginal Voices (AV)* project team, which had undertaken ten Systematic Reviews of recent Australian research on Aboriginal education and, more recently, on empirical research with Aboriginal students and their families (*Weuffen et.al., 2023*). In 2020, the AV team used its mounting evidence on the successes and failures of school systems to affect substantial changes to the educational outcomes of First Nations students to make some claims about what appeared to be seen to "work well", where teachers are supported to engage in robust professional learning, and families and communities are meaningfully involved in the life of schools and its decision-making, outcomes for Indigenous students improve. (*Moodie, Vass, & Lowe, 2021*).

Based on the impoverished intergenerational state educational outcomes for Australian First Nations students and the absence of research that could identify examples of sustained educational improvement, the CNS program represents a notable opportunity to methodically draw on evidence from the few programs that were able to identify potential to positively effect educational engagement and outcomes of students. The discursive studies in the AV project identified the importance of five core issues which were shown to have underpinned the success of programs. These were: 1) Genuine engagement that underpins a new relationship between schools and communities; 2) teachers' practices need to be relational, responsive, and impactful; 3) the critical importance of school programs to understanding students' First Nations identity which is supported by community supported language and cultural programs; 4) deeply engaged, relational leadership that understands the particular environments in which they operate; and 5) the need for a deeper understanding of curriculum and the work it does to marginalise First Nations knowledges and experiences, and a pedagogy that supports teachers to develop a relational and engaging practices of teaching.

Following the broad overview of evidence underpinning the development of the CNS program, the remainder of the paper will discuss the five constituent pedagogic elements, attributes and actions that make the CNS Pedagogic Framework. Each element is defined through reference to both a theoretical/conceptual frame and empirical school-based research on culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogies developed in a range of post-colonial jurisdictions including Australia, New Zealand and North America. Following this overview, and as a working guide for schools, an abridged summary definition is presented that scopes the dimensions of

each element, while establishing the demarcation of the key interlocking attributes. Each of these attributes are then unpacked to demonstrate how the framework has been taken up by teachers in the CNS program, and how it has assisted teachers' understandings and confidence in embedding a critically framed pedagogy as a counter discourse to systemic work of teachers in supporting current curriculum and pedagogic practices.

### Methods

*Qualitative:* Critically informed Indigenist analysis of education policy and practice and its failure to establish an educational environment that is conducive to the social and cultural aspirations of First Nations students.

### Conclusions

The CNS program has established a framework of responsive and culturally affirming practices to assist teachers to visualise the complexities of what is seen to underpin a relationally informed culturally responsive pedagogy. The primary purpose of its development was not to limit the many ways that teachers that can take up the challenges of addressing the needs of culturally minoritized students, but instead to have a structured language to counter the inexorable efforts of an education system that has pushed First Nations students to the epistemic margins and denied them a voice in their own education.

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