



Australian  
CURRICULUM  
Review

# CROSS- CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES**

**Consultation – introductory information and  
organising ideas**

### **Copyright statement**

The copyright material published in this work is subject to the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth) and is owned by ACARA or, where indicated, by a party other than ACARA.

This material is consultation material only and has not been endorsed by Australia's nine education ministers.

You may view, download, display, print, reproduce (such as by making photocopies) and distribute these materials in unaltered form only for your personal, non-commercial educational purposes or for the non-commercial educational purposes of your organisation, provided that you make others aware it can only be used for these purposes and attribute ACARA as the source. For attribution details, refer to clause 5 of the Copyright and Terms of Use published on the Australian Curriculum website – [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/copyright-and-terms-of-use](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/copyright-and-terms-of-use).

ACARA does not endorse any product that uses the Australian Curriculum Review consultation material or make any representations as to the quality of such products. Any product that uses this material should not be taken to be affiliated with ACARA or have the sponsorship or approval of ACARA.

## REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM F–10: CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

#### Introduction

The terms of reference for the Review of the Australian Curriculum F–10 (the Review), require the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), to “revisit and improve where necessary, the organising frameworks for the cross-curriculum priorities with reference to current research”.<sup>1</sup>

Cross-curriculum priorities support the Australian Curriculum to be a relevant, contemporary and engaging curriculum that reflects, regional, national and global contexts. Cross-curriculum priorities are incorporated through learning area content; they are not separate learning areas or subjects. They provide opportunities to enrich the content of the learning areas, where most appropriate and authentic to do so, allowing students to engage with and better understand their world.

There are three cross-curriculum priorities in the F–10 Australian Curriculum:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia
- Sustainability.

Opportunities to apply cross-curriculum priorities to learning area content vary. Cross-curriculum priorities are embedded in content descriptions where the development of knowledge, understanding and skills relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia and/or Sustainability are core to the delivery of the learning area content. They are also identified in content elaborations where they offer opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning.

Each cross-curriculum priority has:

- an **overview statement** that provides a description of the cross-curriculum priority and a rationale for its inclusion in the Australian Curriculum
- a number of **organising ideas** that provide a scaffold for developing the knowledge, understanding and skills of the cross-curriculum priority and promoting connections between the priority and learning area content.

#### Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority

ACARA’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group expressed a strong desire to retain the current conceptual framework of Country/Place, Culture and

<sup>1</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2020, *Terms of reference: Review of the Australian Curriculum F–10*, p. 5.

People for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority. Consultation with the advisory group and other stakeholders during the review process revealed some concerns regarding the accuracy and adequacy of the current organising ideas. A mapping of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures priority across the eight learning areas of the Australian Curriculum also identified similar concerns.

Overall, the Review found that the existing organising ideas were outdated and did not reflect Australia's First Nations Peoples' calls for truth-telling with greater respect for, and inclusion of, First Nations Australians histories and cultures throughout the Australian Curriculum. Specifically, the Review found that the current organising ideas:

- do not include enough truth telling about the experience of First Nations Australians since the arrival of Europeans
- place too much emphasis on the period prior to contact with Europeans, positioning First Nations Peoples of Australia as artefacts of the past
- fail to recognise that the First Peoples of Australia experienced colonisation as invasion and dispossession of land, sea and sky
- lack mention of the *Native Title Act 1993* as a law passed by the Australian Parliament that recognises the rights and interests of First Nations Peoples of Australia in land and waters according to their traditional laws and customs
- do not mention the First Peoples of Australia being recognised as the world's oldest continuing culture
- do not showcase the sophisticated political, economic, and social organisation systems of the First Peoples of Australia
- do not adequately appreciate the breadth and depth of First Nations Australians' contributions to contemporary Australia
- fail to highlight enshrined rights to maintain, control, protect and develop culture as *Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property*.

As a result, the organising ideas have been revised to better reflect core aspects of Country/Place, People and Culture for today and the future, and to provide greater clarity to support their inclusion in selected content descriptions and elaborations in each learning area.

**Attachment 1** presents the updated description and revised organising ideas for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.

**Attachment 2** presents a comparison between the current and revised organising ideas.

## Attachment 1

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority (revised version)

#### Overview

The Australian Curriculum sets consistent national standards to improve learning outcomes for all young Australians. ACARA also acknowledges the gap in learning outcomes between First Nations Australian students and their non-First Nations peers and recognises the need for the Australian Curriculum to provide every possible opportunity to ‘close the gap’.

The Australian Curriculum is working towards addressing these two distinct needs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority, the Australian Curriculum *...provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the ability to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in the curriculum; and allows all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world’s oldest continuous living cultures.*<sup>2</sup>

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority provides opportunities for all students to deepen their knowledge of Australia by learning about the world’s oldest continuous living cultures. Through the Australian Curriculum, students learn that contemporary First Nations Australian communities are strong, resilient, rich and diverse.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority engages with Australia’s First Nations Peoples’ knowledges, experiences, values and perspectives. ACARA, through its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group, sought the voice and incorporated feedback from Australia’s First Nations Peoples to ensure the sensitive and appropriate identification of the essential aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures that all Australians should know.

Using respectful and culturally responsive language is an essential component of reconciliation and strengthening relationships between Australia’s First Nations Peoples and the wider Australian community. A critical step to becoming culturally responsive is the basic recognition that existing collective nouns used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are increasingly being rejected by many First Nations Peoples of Australia.

‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aboriginal’ are broad terms imposed on Australia’s First Nations Peoples without consultation. For many Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their communities, the terms ‘First Nations Australians’ and ‘Australian First Nations Peoples’ are widely accepted to collectively refer to both distinct groups of peoples. These terms encapsulate the cultural diversity of both the First Peoples of Australia (Aboriginal Peoples) and the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait (Torres Strait Islander Peoples) that existed prior to colonisation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Council of Australian Governments, Education Council, 2019, *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, p. 10.

The Australian Curriculum preferences use of the terms ‘First Nations Australians’ and ‘Australian First Nations Peoples’ to collectively describe Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and ensure the culturally sensitive and appropriate identification of the essential aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures framework**

The framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is illustrated in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Framework for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures priority*

Figure 1 depicts ‘living communities’ and ‘identity’ as central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. Australians should know that Australia’s First Nations Peoples form significant, diverse and resilient living communities within contemporary society.

To further explore and understand Australia’s First Nations Peoples’ living communities and identities, the framework articulates and supports the acquisition of deeper knowledge and understanding through the three interconnected aspects of Country/Place, Culture and People.

### **Country/Place**

- Recognises the special connection to Country/Place and celebrates the unique belief systems that connect Australia's First Nations Peoples physically and spiritually to Country/Place.
- Positions First Nations Australians as the traditional owners of Country/Place and highlights how native title law recognises the rights and interests of both the First Peoples of Australia and the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait in Country/Place.
- Acknowledges the impacts of colonisation and the doctrine of *terra nullius* on First Nations Australians' ownership of and access to Country/Place.

### **Culture**

- Examines the cultural diversity of the First Peoples of Australia and the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait, including their unique ways of ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.
- Recognises Australia's First Peoples as belonging to the world's oldest continuous cultures and acknowledges the many historic and enduring impacts on the cultures of First Nations Australians.
- Clarifies that the cultures of First Nations Australians are not static and have internationally enshrined special rights that ensure they can be maintained, controlled, protected and developed.

### **People**

- Acknowledges the occupation of the Australian continent by the First Peoples of Australia for more than 60,000 years.
- Highlights that Australia has two distinct First Nations Peoples each encompassing a diversity of nations and peoples.
- Examines the sophisticated social organisation systems, protocols, kinship structures and the significant contributions of First Nations Australians histories and cultures on a local, national and global scale.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority has three sets of organising ideas to explain each of the three aspects of Country/Place, Culture and People. Together, they identify what many First Nations Australians believe is essential cultural knowledge that all Australians should know.

### **Organising ideas**

#### **Country/Place**

- First Nations communities of Australia maintain a deep connection to, and responsibility for, Country/Place and have holistic belief systems that are connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways. (A\_TSICP1)

- The occupation and colonisation of Australia by the British, under the now overturned doctrine of *terra nullius*, were experienced by First Nations Australians as an invasion that denied their occupation of, and connection to, Country/Place. (A\_TSICP2)
- The First Peoples of Australia and the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait are the traditional owners of Country/Place, recognised in Australian law by the *Native Title Act 1993*. Native title provides opportunities for economic sustainability, allows for input into development on Country/Place, and a voice in the management or development of Country/Place. (A\_TSICP3)

### **Culture**

- First Nations Australian societies are diverse and have distinct cultural expressions such as language, custom and beliefs. As First Nations Peoples of Australia, they have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural expressions, while also maintaining the right to control, protect and develop culture as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. (A\_TSIC1)
- First Nations Australians' ways of life reflect unique ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. (A\_TSIC2)
- The First Peoples of Australia (Aboriginal Peoples) belong to the world's oldest continuous cultures. The First Nations Peoples of Australia, Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, demonstrate resilience in the maintenance, practice and revitalisation of culture, despite the many historic and enduring impacts of colonisation. First Nations Australians continue to develop their past, present and future manifestations of their cultures. (A\_TSIC3)

### **People**

- Australia has two distinct First Nations Peoples broadly known as Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; each encompasses a diversity of nations across Australia. Aboriginal Peoples, increasingly known as First Australians and First Peoples of Australia, are in fact the first peoples of Australia and have occupied the Australian continent for more than 60,000 years. Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait and have occupied the region for over 4,000 years. (A\_TSIP1)
- First Nations Australians have sophisticated political, economic, and social organisation systems, which include family and kinship structures, laws, traditions, customs, land tenure systems, and protocols for strong governance and authority. (A\_TSIP2)
- The significant and ongoing contributions of First Nations Australians and their histories and cultures are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally. (A\_TSIP3)

## Attachment 2

Table 1: Comparison of the current and revised organising ideas of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority

Current organising ideas	Revised organising ideas
<b>Country/Place</b>	<b>Country/Place</b>
Australia has two distinct Indigenous groups: Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and within those groups there is significant diversity. (OI.1)	First Nations communities of Australia maintain a deep connection to, and responsibility for, Country/Place and have holistic belief systems that are connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways. (A_TSICP1)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place. (OI.2)	The occupation and colonisation of Australia by the British, under the now overturned doctrine of terra nullius, were experienced by First Nations Australians as an invasion that denied their occupation of, and connection to, Country/Place. (A_TSICP2)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways. (OI.3)	The First Peoples of Australia and the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait are the traditional owners of Country/Place, recognised in Australian law by the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> . Native title provides opportunities for economic sustainability, allows for input into development on Country/Place, and a voice in the management or development of Country/Place. (A_TSICP3)
<b>Culture</b>	<b>Culture</b>
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups. (OI.4)	First Nations Australian societies are diverse and have distinct cultural expressions such as language, custom and beliefs. As First Nations Peoples of Australia they have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural expressions, while also maintaining the right to control, protect and develop culture as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. (A_TSIC1)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. (OI.5)	First Nations Australians' ways of life reflect unique ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. (A_TSIC2)

Current organising ideas	Revised organising ideas
<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples live in Australia as first peoples of Country or Place and demonstrate resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation. (OI.6)</p>	<p>The First Peoples of Australia (Aboriginal Peoples) belong to the world's oldest continuous cultures. The First Nations Peoples of Australia, Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, demonstrate resilience in the maintenance, practice and revitalisation of culture, despite the many historic and enduring impacts of colonisation. First Nations Australians continue to develop their past, present and future manifestations of their cultures. (A_TSIC3)</p>
<p><b>People</b></p>	<p><b>People</b></p>
<p>The broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies encompass a diversity of nations across Australia. (OI.7)</p>	<p>Australia has two distinct First Nations Peoples broadly known as Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; each encompasses a diversity of nations across Australia. Aboriginal Peoples, increasingly known as First Australians and First Peoples of Australia, are in fact the first peoples of Australia and have occupied the Australian continent for more than 60,000 years. Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait and have occupied the region for over 4,000 years. (A_TSIP1)</p>
<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' family and kinship structures are strong and sophisticated. (OI.8)</p>	<p>First Nations Australians have sophisticated political, economic, and social organisation systems, which include family and kinship structures, laws, traditions, customs, land tenure systems and protocols for strong governance and authority. (A_TSIP2)</p>
<p>The significant contributions of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the present and past are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally. (OI.9)</p>	<p>The significant and ongoing contributions of First Nations Australians and their histories and cultures are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally. (A_TSIP3)</p>