

Re-imagining Catholic Education for First Nations Sovereignty

Report to Catholic Education South Australia

March 2023

Samantha Schulz, Faye Rosas Blanch, Joanne Buckskin, Steve Corrie and Anne Morrison



The University of Adelaide
Flinders University of South Australia
Catholic Education South Australia

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This research was commissioned by Catholic Education South Australia (CESA). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of CESA.

Cover design: Artwork produced for CESA by Artist Nikki Carabetta-Baugh in 2023, a Yamatji woman from WA and Malak-Malak woman from the Northern Territory, who has lived in South Australia for 26 years. Nikki is an active member of the Aboriginal community in Adelaide. Nikki's art style reflects both her traditional upbringing and modern urbanisation.

The story of the artwork: "In this painting I have tried to depict the connections made between faith and education, city and country and first Nations people and Catholic Education SA, as well as our two faiths. Traditionally white represents the 'Dreaming' including our Creator ancestors and spirituality, our connection to culture and 'Country'; it's what connects us as First Nations peoples across this vast country. The ochre-coloured circles represent the thirty Aboriginal nations across South Australia and are varied in size as some communities are smaller/larger than others. They are joined by white dots surrounded by blue and green dots; the white connects us spiritually and the blue/green represents the life-giving waters and vegetation spotted across our barren landscape. The circles spiral out from a large central circle indicative of the CESA Office in Adelaide, stretching out to all of South Australia, including regional and remote schools. I have superimposed the CESA logo over the circles and melded the symbol with one of our most recognisable Dreaming stories, the Rainbow Serpent, a universal story. This is to show the connection between our religions and our mutual respect for one another's cultures and is symbolic of the connection being made by CESA who want to develop better ties with our communities. I have used pastel colours in the serpent/logo symbol as they represent children, education and nurturing which is what CESA is aiming to do by achieving better outcomes for Indigenous students across South Australia."

Note: A black background is used intentionally on the cover to symbolically reverse the norm of a white background, and in so doing, to stimulate reflection and discussion.

**This is to certify that this painting is an original piece by a recognised Aboriginal artist; both story and painting are copyright protected which is, in part, forfeited to CESA which can use images for not-for-profit promotion including but not limited to Action and Strategy documents promoting Indigenous programs within their framework. The Artist is entitled to 15% of any profit made from on-selling the painting.*

Recommended citation:

Schulz, S., Blanch, F., Buckskin, J., Corrie, S. & Morrison, A. (2023). *Re-imagining Catholic Education for First Nations Sovereignty (Report to Catholic Education South Australia)*. Adelaide, SA: The University of Adelaide and Flinders University.

Acknowledgements

This work has been carried out on the traditional Country of the Kurna people of the Adelaide Plains. We pay our respects to Kurna Elders past and present, recognising and respecting their cultural heritage, beliefs, and relationship with Country. We acknowledge Country in expansive terms including landforms, waters, air, trees, rocks, plants, animals, foods, medicines, minerals, special places, and stories.¹ We acknowledge that Country is of continuing importance to Kurna people, who have custodial, community and spiritual responsibilities to care for and protect Country. We also extend our respects to other Aboriginal Language Groups and First Nations, recognising that Catholic Education South Australia's (CESA) footprint stretches from Bunganditj/Boandic Country in the state's southeast (Mt Gambier), Kokatha Country in the far mid north (Roxby Downs), Barngarla Country in the west (Port Lincoln), and Naralte Country in the east (Renmark).

The authors thank:

- Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge holders and stakeholders (respectively) who are connected to South Australian Catholic schools, who have generously participated in various elements of the project to which this Report is attached.
- Dr Neil McGoran, Director Catholic Education South Australia, Ms Nichii Mardon, Director Catholic Education Diocese of Port Pirie, and Mr John Mula, former Deputy Director, for their approval and support of the project for which this Report has been developed.
- Mr Geoff Aufderheide, Education Advisor Aboriginal Education, Ms Amanda Cescato, Senior Education Advisor Engagement and Wellbeing, Ms Teresa Cimino, Manager Learning and Wellbeing, and Ms Pam Ronan, former Manager Learning and Wellbeing, for their collective support and collaboration – with special thanks to Geoff who has managed many complex administrative support tasks with unflagging charity.
- Support staff at The University of Adelaide and Flinders University of South Australia respectively for assisting in the coordination and facilitation of the project to which the Report is attached.

¹ Adapted from Adelaide City Council:

<https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/community/reconciliation/welcome-and-acknowledgement-of-country/> and Victoria University: <https://www.vu.edu.au/about-vu/university-profile/moondani-balluk-indigenous-academic-unit/acknowledging-country/acknowledgement-of-country>.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AC	Australian Curriculum
ACARA	Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APST	Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
CEO	Catholic Education Office
CESA	Catholic Education South Australia
CBL	Creative and Body-Based Learning
CCP	Cross-Curriculum Priority
CRP	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
CRSL	Culturally Responsive School Leadership
LANTITE	Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
OBL	Object Based Learning
PL	Professional Learning
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SAE	Standard Australian English
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

About the authors

Dr Samantha Schulz is project lead for the research consultancy. She is a first generation Australian of British and German heritage and senior sociologist of education at The University of Adelaide. Dr Schulz has research and teaching experience across a diversity of social contexts, including the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, rural Kenya, China, and India. She is co-chief investigator on the Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project *Culturally Responsive Schooling* (DP220100651, 2022-24), which explores how the affective environments of schools attend to the diverse cultural, academic, and emotional needs of their communities. Dr Schulz's broader research includes race critical theorising, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, gender equity, violent extremism, and decoloniality. As a core project, she explored cultural reproductions of race in remote Aboriginal schools using white governmentality as a conceptual lens and extended this work to explore decoloniality in university-led study abroad programmes in India. Dr Schulz co-coordinated Critical Indigenous Pedagogies courses for many years with Dr Faye Rosas Blanch at Flinders University before moving to The University of Adelaide.

Dr Faye Rosas Blanch is a Murri woman from the Atherton Tablelands of Yidniji/Mbarbarm descent. She has worked on Kurna Land in Yunggoendi First Nations Centre for many years, and is presently Senior Lecturer in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, where she leads decolonial, arts-based and Indigenous education courses. Dr Rosas Blanch has worked as an Aboriginal Education Worker, a secondary teacher and a tertiary lecturer. She has published with respect to Indigenous students, community and schooling, and presented at conferences regarding Indigenous ways of being. Dr Rosas Blanch plays a major role in curriculum development in the tertiary sector and is a member of the *Unbound Collective*; a four-women performance group that engages with research and a praxis of decolonisation. Dr Rosas Blanch recently completed her doctoral thesis which utilises arts-based approaches to narrate the relationship between the colonised bodies of Indigenous Australians and the settler colonial state. She is the recipient of teaching excellence awards, and a recent recipient of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Indigenous Grant (2022-2024) for a project that will develop an Indigenous Creative Arts Framework to transform the Humanities across Australian Universities.

Dr Joanne Buckskin is a tertiary educator of Narrungga, Wirangu Wotjobalok heritage. Her key teaching and research fields include Reconciliation and Education, which she brings together in her work as a teacher educator. Dr Buckskin's PhD explored the experiences of non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers undertaking a year-long Enhanced Teacher Training Programme (Indigenous Education) at the University of Wollongong. Dr Buckskin's publications focus on Aboriginal community capacity building, the entanglements of Aboriginality, gender, and work, and Aboriginal youth leadership. Dr Buckskin has worked extensively in community-based projects, including in the areas of national constitutional recognition, reconciliation action planning, restorative justice for Aboriginal communities, working with Aboriginal Elders, and embedding Indigenous knowledges within local government. Dr Buckskin currently works as a lecturer in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, prior to which she worked as a researcher at University of Technology Sydney, and as an Aboriginal Education Lecturer, University of Wollongong.

Dr Steve Corrie is a non-Indigenous education lecturer based at Flinders University of South Australia where he currently oversees all secondary education degree programmes. He has worked in education for more than 25 years, holding senior leadership and teaching positions across primary, secondary and tertiary contexts. Dr Corrie has extensive experience as a school principal in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and his doctoral research titled 'Culturally responsive possibilities: Leaders' voices in remote Indigenous schools' explores the concept and application of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) in remote contexts. Dr Corrie's publications centre on educational practice that connects school learning to student lifeworlds.

Dr Anne Morrison is a white Australian of Anglo lineage with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Linguistics, followed by Honours and a PhD within the discipline of Professional Writing and Communication. She has worked extensively as a research assistant across several Australian universities, with specific expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. Anne was research assistant on the ARC Discovery Project, *Towards an Australian Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, as well as the project *Children learning to live together in a diverse community: Culturally responsive pedagogy in Reggio Emilia inspired early learning settings* (Funded by the SA Department for Education). Anne currently assists on the projects, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogies Action Research: Anangu Lands Partnership Schools*, and *APY Lands Bilingual Education Pilot*, both led by UniSA. Anne has several single and co-authored publications within the broad fields of culturally diverse and First Nations education, including leading the major literature review, *Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: A narrative review of the literature*.

Executive Summary

This Report has been produced for Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) as part of a research-consultancy entitled *Re-imagining Catholic Education for First Nations Sovereignty* (University of Adelaide HREC Approval H-2022-085). CESA commissioned the authors (Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and educators with extensive experience in First Nations Education) to help develop their Draft Aboriginal Education Strategy, with input from Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge holders and stakeholders connected to Catholic South Australian schools and centres. The research-consultancy was carried out during 2022 using methods that are intellectually rigorous and culturally appropriate. It involved several main phases, starting with a robust Literature Review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in Australia. The Literature Review serves as a framework for contextualising subsequent phases of the study: Roundtable discussions with members of CESA’s institutional leadership; Yarning Circles with First Nations peoples connected to Catholic South Australian schools and centres; Surveys with staff from across CESA sites; and Surveys with parents/caregivers of First Nations young people in Catholic South Australian schools and centres. The study also included Professional Learning workshops developed and facilitated by the authors with teachers and leaders from across CESA.

The project has produced a Literature Review with resources suite, Report, and Draft Strategy with recommendations. These products surface at a historically significant time. Australia is engaged in genuine conversations concerning how best to advance Voice, Truth, and Treaty. The Catholic Church in Australia has officially endorsed the Uluru Statement from the Heart and committed to walking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to heal wounds and generate necessary social change. The Australian Curriculum version 9.0, and Early Years/School Age Care Learning Frameworks V2.0 have rolled out nationally with strengthened commitments to First Nations’ perspectives and languages. Against this backdrop, CESA’s Reconciliation Action Plan (2021) boldly states:

Reconciliation implies ‘making right’ or healing. Truth-telling is an important aspect of healing. [...] For truth-telling to be effective we need to practice ‘truth-listening’, giving opportunity for Aboriginal voices to speak, being open to sitting with discomfort and also hearing the call to action – responding with compassion rather than responding to discomfort. (p. 2)

This Report has been produced with these sentiments in mind. It is an unflinching expression of truth-telling which invites truth-listening, and albeit sometimes confronting for non-Indigenous Australians to engage in these practices, Aboriginal voices across the literature and from within this study repeatedly ask that non-Indigenous Australians listen to “our complete history [and] see your place in that history” (Moodie et al., 2021, p. 11). Moreover, these voices stress that Australia’s colonial history is not distant and disconnected from us; it reaches into the present and every aspect of our contemporary lives. But the Report is ultimately hopeful. It centres Aboriginal voices that have been silenced for too long in the broader context of Australia. It floodlights that which CESA is achieving which warrants recognition and expansion. And it highlights clear steps for growth, which are achievable within a system where a groundswell of goodwill and ethical commitments are already established. We present its key findings here and suggest that CESA should feel confident to take the next steps in this important and necessary work.

Key Findings

1. There is no singular or fixed model of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are multiple, rich, and dynamic.
3. All First Nations peoples have rights to an equitable and empowering education that advances Indigenous rights and cultures, as vested in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (UN General Assembly, 2007) and Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education (Morgan et al., 2006).
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is both about centring First Nations perspectives as well as re-educating everyone to unlearn deficit beliefs and practices, which are deeply embedded in Australia's dominant cultural imaginary.
5. A first step in generating culturally safe and effective learning environments for First Nations, and indeed all, learners is dismantling deficit discourses of Aboriginality, which are forms of covert racism – this is primarily the work of the dominant culture who in turn represent the majority teaching and educational leadership force in Australia.
6. Initial teacher education and in-service professional learning (PL) which grounds understandings in cultural responsiveness and critical orientations to First Nations education is vital for all staff, but so too is working towards cultural diversification of all levels of the educational workforce.
7. Culturally responsive PL should focus on local site and cross-site capacity building, which means investing in educators and supporting First Nations educators to advance through the institutional hierarchy.
8. Aboriginal Education is everyone's responsibility and is best advanced through whole-site and system commitments that are focused on relationship building with local First Nations communities and Elders. Sites can start by becoming culturally safe.
9. Educators and leaders are not expected to be experts in Aboriginal cultures. They can be co-learners with students, communities, and Country.
10. Curriculum is a site of negotiation and a potential site of decolonisation. Whole site commitments to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP or approved learning frameworks for Early Years and School Age Care, as well as critical interpretations of APST focus areas 1.4 and 2.4, helps all learners to develop intercultural understanding and normalises the presence of First Nations content.
11. Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for Aboriginal students must be designed from a strengths-based perspective and embedded within collective learning and power-sharing experiences that reinforce the social, unifying function of education – learning on/with Country is good for this.
12. Effective pedagogy is relational. It is grounded in an ethic of care and pedagogy of love that centres learner lifeworlds.
13. Conceptions of educational 'success' can include existing formal measures but should also be co-developed with First Nations learners, their families, and communities as partners in the learning community. Aboriginal voices consistently speak of educational 'success' in terms of cultural safety.

14. Aboriginal Education is important regardless of whether Aboriginal students are present.

Recommendations

Based on triangulation of data covered in this Report, the research-consultancy makes the following recommendations for a 10-year Aboriginal Education Strategy. A 10-year strategy (2024-34) is recommended for two reasons: the Strategy is about cultural change; it is also grounded in relationship building and widespread professional learning, all of which take time. Recommendations that are adopted are substantiated by the research base. Once steps are discussed across CESA, agreed, and adopted, internal timelines and reviews can be applied, which are negotiated at local levels to be feasible and sustainable. The key areas for recommended growth relate to the following areas – in this section of the report we name each area and its related principle; the final section of the report elaborates on the principles with practical action steps:

1. CEO Aboriginal Education Unit

Core Principle: The CEO Aboriginal Education Unit is widely recognised by CESA staff, parents/caregivers and community as serving at least two important roles: Supporting educators and sites to advance Aboriginal Education; setting a high standard by championing CESA's Aboriginal Education agenda.

2. Cultural Responsivity

Core Principle: First Nations cultures are diverse, and Aboriginal learners are located across a diversity of geographic sites and communities that are themselves increasingly superdiverse. Cultural responsivity underscores the notion that all learners thrive when their lifeworlds are brought to the centre of learning and recognised as rich learning assets.

3. Racial Literacy

Core Principle: Racism is a key determinant of educational experiences and outcomes and is deeply harmful to First Nations' learners within schooling and throughout the life course. Yet, the levels of racial literacy amongst Australia's majority white teaching and educational leadership force tends to be far lower than that of Indigenous and other racial minority staff, learners, parents/caregivers, and communities. Aboriginal voices consistently call for this to change.

4. Leaders

Core Principle: Whilst early learning sites in Australia tend to be characterised by a more culturally diverse staff and leadership, it remains that most Australian school leaders are white and middle-class. Yet, Australian learners and their communities are growing superdiverse, including within the context of many CESA sites. First Nations parents/caregivers look to site leaders to assess the suitability and safety of the site for their child/ren. Culturally responsive leaders are highly valued by Aboriginal parents/caregivers. Such leaders are reflexively self-aware, share power, and build inclusive cultures across schools/centres and communities. Leaders must be supported by the institutional hierarchy to do this work.

5. Educators

Core Principle: As with leaders, most Australian teachers are white. Non-Indigenous educators can and do make a positive difference in the lives of First Nations learners and their communities, but to do so must first move beyond deficit ways of thinking and commit to social equity. In

contrast to Australia's non-Indigenous (predominantly white) teaching fraternity, Indigenous peoples are seriously under-represented in the Australian teaching workforce, despite being in a unique position to be the link between worlds for First Nations learners.

6. Learners

Core Principle: It is important for all educational staff to appreciate that not all First Nations learners are the same. Not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students learn the same way. There is no 'one way' to teach Aboriginal students. Teachers may not know if they have Aboriginal students in their presence – it is the right of Aboriginal peoples to decide when or if to self-identify. Learning to listen to and learn from Aboriginal students (indeed all learners) is a starting point for educational staff to establish an ethic of care that underpins successful learning and relational trust.

7. Curriculum

Core Principle: Curriculum is a site of negotiation and a potential site for decolonisation. The AC version 9.0 and Early Years/School Age Care Learning Frameworks V2.0 ask all educators to strengthen their commitments to First Nations perspectives and languages. An Indigenised curriculum that leverages the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP or approved learning frameworks for Early Years and School Age Care helps all students to develop intercultural understanding and normalises the presence of First Nations content. Incorporating First Nations perspectives is good for all learners at all levels of learning. This includes learning on and with Country.

8. Pedagogy

Core Principle: Pedagogy is relational. Fundamentally, pedagogy is about learning *through* the development of respectful relationships between educators and learners, learners and learners, and the knowledge that learners and educators co-produce in-context/with Country. Culturally responsive pedagogy is good for all learners. It involves creating educational contexts that allow for respectful encounters between people, relationship-building, rich dialogue, and deep listening 'with' culturally located individuals. The ethos of Catholic Education explicitly attends to holistic learning for all students, which resonates well with cultural responsiveness.

9. Relationships and Wellbeing

Core Principle: Relationships are central to wellbeing for First Nations peoples. Wellbeing can be understood in terms connections to Country, culture, family, community, spirituality, place, and identity. All educational staff must move from narrow understandings of wellbeing as located within 'the individual', to awareness that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing means the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. Moreover, Aboriginal wellbeing is contingent upon non-Indigenous peoples ensuring that they are not sources of ongoing trauma for Aboriginal peoples, for instance, through unintentionally enacting covert racism. Thus, First Nations' wellbeing is contingent on the commitments and critical re-education of non-Indigenous Australians.

10. Tracking and Celebrating Success

Core Principle: Mainstream or formal Australian education systems typically track success using measures and tools that are grounded in Anglo-Centric languages, worldviews, and ways of being. Aboriginal peoples express the desire, and have an inalienable right, to be supported to be

successful via these mainstream measures. However, successful schooling systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and their families are also those which embrace expanded, culturally responsive, and contextualised measures of success, which are co-developed at the local level. Furthermore, First Nations' voices within this study and across the literature foreground cultural safety as a key measure of educational success for all First Nations learners.

Introduction

Mass compulsory (or formal) schooling modelled on English and Scottish curricula took root across most Western countries between 1869 and 1882 including in Australia (Connell, 2019; Miller, 1998). During this period, what little formal schooling was extended to the Indigenous child was based on the dominant cultural assumption that the Aboriginal 'race' was socially and biologically inferior (Tatz, 2013). The first school for Aboriginal students in Sydney in 1814 constituted an attempt to civilise Aboriginal peoples away from their cultures (and lands), by inculcating Christian beliefs and European ways of being (Beresford, 2012). These early efforts to civilise and Christianise Aboriginal peoples through education were paradoxically framed by the dominant cultural presumption that, despite having thrived for thousands of years, Aboriginal peoples were a 'doomed' or 'dying race' (Hollinsworth, Raciti & Carter, 2021).

Prior to the 1960s, Aboriginal children were therefore mostly excluded from formal Australian schooling based on a combination of racialised beliefs concerning their supposed fate or ineducability or treated to minimum schooling in segregated institutions to protect settler populations from racial contamination (Anderson, 2002; Hogarth, 2018). With the slow demise of the White Australia Policy – precipitated by the pragmatic need to incorporate 'less white' peoples into the fledgling nation – Australian education nonetheless started to change. Policies of assimilation, integration and then, cultural pluralism fuelled efforts to include the Aboriginal child more comprehensively in schooling, albeit to offset Aboriginal culture (Partington, 2002, p. 3). The purview of educational policy makers was not to preserve or acknowledge Aboriginal cultures through schooling but to assist the Indigenous child to abandon her cultural heritage (Palmer, 1971).

Under the steam of multiculturalism, self-determination and eventually, reconciliation, 'benevolent' inclusion of Aboriginal children in schooling slowly metamorphosed into 'empowered' educational orientations, driven both by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Craven, 1999). Yet, even the latter endeavours, which sought to celebrate Aboriginal cultures and transform aspects of schooling that harm the Indigenous child, remained overshadowed by policies that naturalised Anglo-centric whiteness as the norm and pinnacle of Australian society (Kalantzis, Cope & Hughes, 1985). From the mid-1990s, critical and progressive endeavours were steadily subsumed by neoliberal drives to standardise education² and minimise the educational gap (Rudolph, 2019) – where gaps in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students were dominantly conceptualised as the need to improve the Indigenous child. To this day, 'gap rhetoric' (Burgess & Lowe, 2022) continues to inform Australia's dominant policy and common-sense means of perceiving the Aboriginal learner – a learner who is constituted through dominant discourses of schooling as requiring help to rise up and reach normative (i.e., white) educational standards.

Reconceptualising the gap

The far majority of contemporary educational research concerning Aboriginal peoples – and importantly, research which is driven by and centres First Nations' voices – powerfully articulates that 'gap talk' (Vass, 2013, 2014) is a problematic way of understanding Aboriginal peoples or approaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. Pholi, Black and Richards (2009) explain:

² For example, through the eventual establishment of a uniform national curriculum and testing mechanisms.

The defining features of Indigenous Australians according to the Close the Gap approach are, of necessity, deficits. Performance measurements in closing the gap requires a range of baseline data on what is wrong with Indigenous people. Deficit data then forms the basis of what is known about Indigenous people. This in turn sets the strategic goals for action to fix Indigenous people. Because the deficits are clearly situated within Indigenous Australians, progress is measured by the extent to which Indigenous Australians change for the better, thus insulating existing institutions, systems and power structures from an expectation to change also or change instead. 'Success' is defined by the extent to which Indigenous Australians conform to a set of pre-determined, measurable characteristics of the non-Indigenous ideal, while 'failure' is any outcome that falls below, or manifests outside the scope of these ideal indicators. ... This means that anything that may be uniquely positive about being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is of little relevance to the 'evidence base'. (p. 10)

Although in 2020, Closing the Gap policy was refreshed³ – and whilst the new targets promise greater Aboriginal involvement in implementation and measurement, greater internal accountability mechanisms for government, and new commitments to redress structural racism in mainstream government organisations – the new targets remain chiefly focused upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and not necessarily the work required to re-educate and transform White society. Conceptualising Indigenous peoples as problems to be changed stretches back to the first waves of colonisation, or as Hollinsworth (1992) argues, before 1788 the very idea of “the Aboriginal was a social construction of the colonising power” (p. 138). Aboriginality through a European lens has persistently been reduced,

... to the immediately observable and the primitive. Where manifest Aboriginality in these terms does not exist, the people are perceived as empty vessels, drained of their content by European contact, and capable only of echoing the loud noises from European society. (Chase as cited in Hollinsworth, 1992, p. 139)

This report and associated materials fundamentally oppose these patterns by amplifying First Nations' voices, which repeatedly teach us: to embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education equitably is, firstly, to transform these problematic ways of thinking. In their place, we can collectively understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education as:

1. For everyone and an opportunity to value the oldest living – and dynamic – cultures on earth in ways that are mutually enriching.
2. Not defined by a singular or fixed model given that there is no singular or fixed Aboriginal culture – First Nations learners, families, communities, and cultures come in myriad forms.
3. Both about centring First Nations perspectives as well as re-educating everyone to unlearn the beliefs and practices which harm Indigenous peoples, ultimately harming us all.
4. Focused on generating thriving educational environments which celebrate cultural diversity while combatting racism.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is, therefore, not a discrete entity bolted on to existing structures, but a gradual 'browning' (Fricker, 2017) of curriculum, pedagogies, and structures such that First Nations knowledges and ways of being become part of everyone's knowing. Moreover, it is about centring all learners' lifeworlds to embrace cultural diversity as a learning asset. Certainly, no one is advocating that gaps in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners

³ See <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>.

be accepted. Aboriginal voices throughout the research literature, as well those to surface through this research, state clearly: parents/caregivers and communities of First Nations learners as well as Aboriginal students themselves wish to excel in education in countless ways. However, educational success should not come at the expense of Aboriginal sovereignty, pride or identity, or be realised in the absence of White Australia shifting its frame of understanding.

Like Anderson, Yip and Diamond (2022), this report thus reverses the analytic gaze from Indigenous peoples to school systems by asking, ‘How ready is the education system – in this case, the South Australian Catholic Education system – to educate Indigenous students to their full potential’? Vass and colleagues (2019) note, schooling has failed too many Australian Indigenous students for too long. Therefore, this report reconceptualises the gap by focusing on the ‘accumulated deficits’ (Hardy, 2016) of schooling and frames these deficits as the ‘education debt’ (Ladson-Billings, 2006) owed to Australian Indigenous young people, their families, Countries, and communities. The report is written from a strengths-based perspective that is optimistic about the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is enriching for everyone. It aims to illuminate both the persistent, endemic problems that marginalise and undermine Indigenous peoples through schooling, as well as offering hopeful alternatives and fruitful starting points, which build on the powerful work already playing out across CESA.⁴

Report structure

The following sections describe the methodology used to carry out the research underpinning both the report and Draft Strategy. The next sections condense key findings from each of the research phases: the literature review; roundtables; yarning circles; and surveys (as well as professional learning workshops, which enrich the broader findings). The final sections – conclusion and recommendations – bring the report together.

⁴ Note that the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is sometimes referred to as Aboriginal Education in this report, both to reflect terminology used within CESA but also in line with conventions outlined in the extended Glossary – see Appendix A.

Methodology

The project sought to explore the question: How is CESA reimagined for First Nations sovereignty through the development of its Draft Aboriginal Education Strategy? The project brought together methods from case study (Yazan, 2013) and educational action research (Noffke & Somekh, 2009) whilst utilising roundtables (akin to focus groups), yarning circles, and online qualitative surveys for data generation. We employed collaborative modes of research which acknowledge partner insights as a basis for local capacity-building. Such approaches create space for fostering institutional ownership of The Strategy as knowledge-holders and stakeholders discuss, share, and critically reflect upon relevant research, themes, stories, and questions.

Sub questions were used to facilitate each phase of data generation:

- Sub question 1: What constitutes effective and equitable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education? (Project phase: Literature Review).
- Sub question 2: What insights into CESA – its educational, operational, and social/cultural dynamics – are co-constituted in First Nations knowledge holder accounts? (Project phases: Yarning Circles and Aboriginal parent/caregiver surveys).
- Sub question 3: What insights into CESA – its educational, operational, and social/cultural dynamics – are co-constituted in participant accounts? (Project phases: Roundtables, staff surveys, and educator/leader professional learning workshops).
- Sub question 4: How does input from Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders shape the possibilities for equity-oriented educational transformation? (All phases).

To approach the research, Indigenist and decolonial frameworks were also utilised. Within the field of education, social justice work is often carried out through the lens of critical theory. Decolonial projects expand the work of justice to include not only transformations within individuals, but individuals' relationships to systems of oppression as well as "the structures of colonisation that need to be dismantled" (Zembylas, 2018, p. 96). These structures work through, and differentially position individuals within the context of Australian education. Decolonial orientations move beyond benevolent inclusion of First Nations learners into unreconstructed mainstream schools or centres, towards deeper, system-wide change, recognising that Western education and research have historically been implicated in reproducing colonial harms (Stein et al., 2020; Smith, 2012). As researchers adopting a decolonial purview, we aimed to challenge these dynamics by acknowledging how they are sustained: i.e. through belief systems and norms that arbitrate knowledge to designate who counts as 'fully' human, typically positioning non-western worldviews as inferior (Andreotti, 2011). Decolonial research demands this awareness alongside recognition of our positionalities as researchers.

We came to the project as Indigenous (Blanch and Buckskin) and non-Indigenous (Schulz, Corrie, and Morrison) educators and researchers. We represent both the dominant group that 'controls' educational systems while benefiting from Indigenous dispossession, as well as sovereign subjects whose wisdom, voices, perspectives, and knowledges are too often silenced or denied. To expose the ways that these dynamics are reproduced, including through and by us, the research also drew upon 'race' and whiteness as lenses that were applied to every phase of the project. We understand 'race' as a social construction, regime of power and political project that is reproduced through daily practices and interactions as well as through policies and institutionalised norms (Bargallie & Lentin, 2022). We understand whiteness as a socially constructed category that is "normalised within systems

that privilege whites” (Zembylas, 2018, p. 86). Understanding how these discourses contribute to our worlds and identities increased our possibilities of going beyond the limits that they impose (Davies, 1991).

To complement a decolonial framework, the study drew upon Rigney’s (1999) Indigenist principle of centring Indigenous voices in scholarship about Indigenous peoples. Rigney’s (2020) core mandate is that schools/centres, educators, and researchers build community partnerships and embed Aboriginal cultures as a driving force for culturally responsive education. Finally, when developing the project’s ethics application, we applied the AIATSIS Code of Ethics, the NHMRC ‘Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders’, and the Universities Australia updated ‘National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research’. The ethics application was submitted for full review and approved by both Catholic Education South Australia and The University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC number H-2022-085) under the guidance of First Nations reviewers.

Project phases

Literature review: The project began with a literature review that draws upon approximately 500 carefully selected sources. A narrative approach was chosen in keeping with Greenhalgh et al’s (2018) observation that conventional systematic reviews address narrowly focused questions to summarise the field. “Narrative reviews provide interpretation and critique; their key contribution is deepening understanding” (p. 2). Rigney’s (1999) Indigenist principle underpinned the privileging of First Nations’ voices. While an iterative process of reference harvesting using Google Scholar, Scopus and education databases was employed, drawing from Tynan and Bishop (2022), we also remained mindful that what counts as literature within the context of formal academic literature reviews is a Western construct. To learn from and value Indigenous ‘Knowings’ it was sometimes necessary to therefore extend our reach to include literature which exists “beyond academic prescription” (Tynan & Bishop, 2022, p. 5). The robustness of the literature review provided a backdrop against which to consider data generated in subsequent phases of the project – in what follows, key points from the literature review thus establish a context. And whilst, being of qualitative design, the project does not claim generalisability in a quantitative sense, the robustness of the literature review meant that resonances to emerge across the study contributed towards strongly informed conclusions.

Roundtables: Two sets of roundtable discussions (similar to focus groups) were carried out in July 2022 with volunteer participants occupying various leadership roles across the state and from within CESA’s Catholic Education Office (CEO) – each roundtable included 8-10 participants and the interview schedule captured key themes to emerge from the literature review. Roundtables were informed by the view that knowledge is not merely the product of individual minds but co-produced dialogically in context. The roundtables provided an opportunity to engage in critical discussions concerning the ways in which participants conceptualised concepts or practices such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, racism, whiteness, cultural responsiveness, and First Nations sovereignty, as well as the links between such phenomena and contemporary schooling. All roundtable participants drew from the Anglo-dominated mainstream, as did the facilitators of the discussions (Chief Investigators [CIs] Schulz and Corrie).⁵ The aim was not to exclude Indigenous voices but to engage in rich and

⁵ All phases of the project were co-designed by the research team. At times, it was appropriate for non-Indigenous team members to lead discussions. At other times, project phases were led by Indigenous team members. Such decisions took seriously the emotional costs to Aboriginal academics working within predominantly White institutions, particularly when discussions centre on questions of whiteness, and racism.

challenging dialogue as a professional learning community at the figurative head of the organisation. This was important in the broader scope of the project given the potential influence that leaders hold within any educational institution. Data were audio-recorded, transcribed, anonymised, and returned to participants for review or amendment. Participants were free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Yarning circles: Three yarning circles were carried out with First Nations knowledge holders connected to Catholic South Australian schools, including parents/caregivers and graduated students (i.e. those who had completed school and were above 18 years of age, per ethical requirements). The yarning circles were carried out between September and October 2022. Yarning circles were facilitated by First Nations CIs Blanch and Buckskin,⁶ with each circle including 5-10 participants who were remunerated for their time. Although ‘calls for participants’ were distributed state-wide, and whilst regional yarning circles had been planned, each event took place in a confidential urban South Australian setting.⁷ Yarning circles were based on Aboriginal cultural protocols which enable participants to come together in equal status to listen to each other’s stories, experiences, and perspectives (Shay, 2021). Yarning circles allow researchers and participants to work together to produce knowledge. For this project, the yarning circles helped to deepen awareness of how Catholic Education in South Australia is experienced from the standpoint of First Nations peoples. The orientation to knowledge and truth underpinning this phase of the study saw knowledge as a co-production that emerges dynamically during interaction as generative possibilities emerge (Morrison et al, 2019, pp. 1-2). Drawing on the work of First Nations (Apalech) Australian scholar, Tyson Yunkaporta (Yunkaporta, 2009; Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011), crucial here was the place of narrative – yarning – as the central modality of thinking, learning, doing, knowing, and being for Aboriginal cultures. Guiding questions derived both from the literature review and roundtables. Data were audio-recorded, transcribed, anonymised, and returned to participants for review or amendment. Participants were free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Surveys (and professional learning workshops): Two online surveys were administered electronically and extended state-wide: the first for any staff member of a South Australian Catholic Education school or centre, the second for parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students attending a Catholic South Australian school or centre. Invitations to participate were distributed by the CEO on multiple occasions and surveys remained open September-October 2022. Survey questions were developed from the literature review and roundtables. The parent/caregiver survey was limited to five main questions using plain language to accommodate varying familiarity with SAE, as well as to avoid cultural taxation. However, time and funding permitting, surveys would ideally be distributed via multiple modalities in a range of languages. These are important considerations for CESA for future iterations of similar projects or when reviewing The Strategy. In addition, two, full-day professional learning workshops were facilitated by all CIs and held at the CEO in Hindmarsh, South Australia: Tuesday 8 November 2022 (Educators), and Tuesday 15 November 2022 (Leaders). Participation was open to any teacher or leader working in a Catholic South Australian school or centre. Approximately 30 teachers attended the first event, and 11 leaders attended the second event. Although the workshops focused primarily on theories, strategies, discussions, and practices for

⁶ CIs Blanch and Buckskin have extensive experience across education sectors and Aboriginal community projects in South Australia and nationally. They are experienced facilitators of yarning circles, accredited in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid and Narrative Practice, and equipped with protocols for responding to risk or distress.

⁷ This speaks to the need for researchers to spend appropriate time in situ developing relational trust with potential research participants. Future iterations of The Strategy that invite input from regional First Nations’ knowledge holders must take these issues into consideration, which implicates scheduling and funding.

improving education for First Nations learners, data were also generated in the form of 'poster dialogues', which asked participants:

1. What they are doing well (with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education) at their site.
2. How they could improve.
3. Fears, concerns, or apprehensions they may have.
4. Their greatest challenges.
5. What they would like to see in CESA's forthcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy.
6. How their own education did/did not prepare them to teach for First Nations sovereignty.

Where useful, anonymised feedback from these poster dialogues is incorporated into forthcoming sections of the report.

Information from the roundtables, yarning circles, and surveys that is presented in forthcoming sections has been distilled for ease of widespread comprehension. Any deidentified quotes drawn from these data serve as proxies for patterns to emerge more broadly.

What the Literature Review tells us

The literature review considered several key themes to arise consistently in the scholarship on Australian First Nations schooling and education. These themes are:

- Cultural Responsivity
- Racial Literacy
- Leaders, Educators, and Learners
- Professional Learning
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy
- Relationships and Wellbeing

The following represents a snapshot of what this literature tells us:

History of the present of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

- Australian mainstream education has never served First Nations' peoples adequately and in many ways, has continued colonial harms through denying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty, languages, knowledges, and cultures. In their place, the dominant culture has developed and reproduced deficit conceptualisations of Aboriginality, with these beliefs and practices becoming normalised in schools and society. Education is a site where these historical patterns can and must be reversed.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education incorporates this work. It is for everyone and is an opportunity to value the oldest living – and dynamic – cultures on earth in ways that are mutually enriching.
- Research says that South Australian educators are under immense pressure with many reporting that they are 'at breaking point' (Windle et al, 2022). The paradoxical need to 'satisfy standardised accountability frameworks' (i.e. such as the NAPLAN) while 'catering equitably for cultural diversity' adds to this pressure.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education should not be conceived as an additional task but a shared endeavour to do education differently with full support of local and state-level leadership.
- There is no 'one way' to 'do' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. There is no 'one' Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture – there are dynamic and evolving First Nations cultures.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is both about centring First Nations perspectives as well as re-educating everyone to unlearn deficit beliefs and practices.
- Thriving educational environments are those that celebrate cultural diversity and bring it to the centre of learning whilst dismantling racism.

Cultural responsivity

- The practice of cultural responsivity has surfaced in Australia as a hopeful means of offsetting the tensions faced by educators who must 'satisfy standardised mandates' while 'catering for cultural diversity'.
- Cultural responsivity is an approach for working within and against the codes of the 'dominant' culture by bringing Western and Aboriginal knowledge systems into fruitful dialogue.

- Cultural responsiveness is presented as an overarching philosophy. It is a broad and evolving set of practices and critical philosophical stance. Cultural responsiveness does not replace the many distinct ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education has been (or is being) practiced, such as Both Ways Schooling, Flexi Schooling, or Critical Place Based Education (for example).
- Cultural responsiveness is a lens that can be applied to a dynamic repertoire of practices, which is defined by a strengths-based approach to valuing cultural diversity as a learning asset.
- Cultural responsiveness is about creating educational contexts that allow for respectful encounters between people, relationship-building, rich dialogue, and deep listening 'with' culturally located individuals.
- A core element of culturally responsive schooling is the need to move beyond deficit understandings of Aboriginality to recognise the wisdom and deep cultural wealth of Aboriginal peoples, communities, and Country.
- Culturally responsive education is good education for everyone.

Racial literacy

The literature finds that racism is a key determinant of educational experiences and outcomes and is deeply harmful to First Nations' learners within schooling and throughout the life course (Moodie, Maxwell & Rudolph, 2019, p. 292). The literature additionally finds that there is a dearth of understanding of 'what racism is' amongst Australia's majority white teaching force (Forrest et al, 2016; MacGill, 2022). Despite its deep impacts, the research also highlights that major Australian education policy typically fails to mention let alone redress racism (Moreton-Robinson et al, 2012; Guenther, Ober, Osborne & Williamson-Kefu, 2021). Aboriginal voices consistently call for this to change, through among other means, the development of racial literacy in members of the dominant culture (see for example Moodie & Patrick, 2017; Moodie et al, 2019).

- Racial literacy expresses the capacity to read a racialised world and act from an anti-racist standpoint.
- Racial literacy involves at least 5 key insights:
 1. Understanding that racism is a contemporary problem, not just something in the past.
 2. Understanding that race is socially constructed but has a profound effect on educational experiences and outcomes (in other words, racism manifests materially, for instance in mortality and morbidity rates, health and wellbeing).
 3. Recognising the ways in which racism is institutionalised in systems like education (for example, curriculum which fails to include and centralise First Nations' perspectives or which reproduces deficit/narrow views of Aboriginality).
 4. Gaining comfort/practice in reading, reflecting upon, discussing, and addressing racially stressful encounters.
 5. All educational staff can apply a racial literacy lens and skills to their understandings of their roles.
- Racial literacy is about exposing and dismantling deficit racialised beliefs about Aboriginal and other racial minority groups.
- The literature provides insight into forms of racism that are prevalent in schooling and society, which become internalised and reproduced (or performed and repeated) through everyday encounters, i.e. race or white blindness, white fragility.

Leaders

- The work of educational leaders in Australia is highly complex. It is nonetheless important that leaders develop deep awareness of past and ongoing negative impacts of mainstream education on Aboriginal peoples and set a tone within schools/centres where this knowledge is understood and discussed.
- Culturally responsive leaders are reflexively self-aware, share power, and build inclusive cultures across schools/centres and communities.

Non-Indigenous Educators

- Most Australian teachers are white.
- Research finds that white people's acknowledgement of racism is typically much lower than that of the non-white communities who may surround and attend schools/centres. When non-Indigenous and particularly white educators have not developed racial literacy, they may unintentionally form deficit opinions of non-white students before setting foot in the classroom/centre.
- An equity-oriented disposition which includes awareness of Australia's past and ongoing colonial harms is crucial for all Australian educators, especially those who are white.
- Whilst non-Indigenous educators often express fear or apprehension to incorporate First Nations perspectives or to discuss racism, it is important that fear does not manifest as paralysis. Token or initial efforts can grow into genuine educational programmes that embrace, celebrate, and learn from Aboriginal ways of knowing and being.
- Educators do not need to be experts on issues like racism or on Aboriginal cultures – they can learn 'with' students and community.
- Non-Indigenous educators are best supported to engage in this work through team-teaching and whole-of-school or centre approaches, and through shared awareness that this work requires stamina. It can be messy and imperfect, but it is also about everyone's enhanced education and wellbeing.

Indigenous Educators

- Indigenous teachers represent a minority in Australia and often face the challenge of establishing a professional identity that is not racialised (Burgess, 2017).
- Indigenous educators and paraprofessionals play vital roles in schools and centres but may be poorly remunerated, lack power, and often lack status in the institutional hierarchy.
- Indigenous educators and paraprofessionals must be recognised for the vital roles they play, which can include fast-tracking Indigenous staff, with adequate support, to occupy higher-status roles within the institution, as well as setting targets/quotas and timelines to employ more First Nations staff.⁸

Learners

- Not all First Nations learners are the same.
- Not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students learn the same way.
- There is no 'one way' to teach Aboriginal students.
- Teachers may not know if they have Aboriginal students in their presence.

⁸ See for example Gide et al (2022).

- Learning to listen to and learn from Aboriginal students (indeed all learners) is a starting point for establishing an ethic of care that underpins successful learning and relational trust.
- Aboriginal students may or may not be deeply connected to their Aboriginal cultural heritage owing to the impacts of colonisation.
- Aboriginal young people who are not connected to their cultural heritage may feel a sense of loss or shame about these intergenerational disconnections over which they have had no control.
- It is inappropriate to automatically position Aboriginal students as experts on Aboriginality – they may be learning too.
- Urban, rural, and regional Aboriginal students will have different experiences of Aboriginal identity. All experiences of Aboriginal identity are authentic.
- Successful learning for Aboriginal students must involve curriculum and pedagogy that respectfully represents Aboriginality as heterogenous, evolving, empowered, and dynamic.
- Research indicates that many Aboriginal learners express strong desires to be connected to other First Nations learners, to learn on and with Country, and to learn from Elders.
- Connecting learning to Country and community/family underpins a culturally nourishing education, which has benefits for all learners.
- The exclusion, underappreciation, or misinterpretation of Aboriginality in curricula and pedagogy can be experienced by Aboriginal youth as ‘everyday’ or covert forms of racism, which are deeply damaging.
- Aboriginal learners, across various studies, articulate appreciation when educators/schools make efforts to expand their learning repertoires and are hopeful that schools will move beyond lip service and towards more substantial, genuine educational programmes that embrace, celebrate, and learn from Aboriginal ways of knowing and being, for everyone’s benefit.
- Schools and educators should work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families to develop culturally responsive behaviour management strategies grounded in a foundation of relational trust.

Professional Learning

- All professional learning (PL) should highlight the importance of staff beginning with a deep commitment to social justice.
- All PL with respect to Aboriginal peoples should foreground that colonisation has inflicted immense damage on First peoples, and that schools are implicated in ongoing colonial harms, but can be sites of healing and re-learning.
- Professional learning communities develop a shared language and common vision for educational success that centralises First Nations cultures.
- When everyone in the learning community shares in the key learning goal of improving schooling for First Nations students, when time and space is created for ongoing professional dialogue and reflection that supports this goal, and when both internal and external relationships are established that align the learning goals of the school or centre with those of the community, then one-off PL focused upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education will be absorbed into a receptive learning culture.

Curriculum

- A ‘just’ curriculum is one in which the most marginalised are recognised and representatively empowered (Brennan & Zipin, 2018).

- To ‘brown the curriculum’ (Fricker, 2017) is to make it less White and in so doing redress racism as curricula exclusion – this is part of a decolonising agenda.
- A ‘just’ approach includes working within and against the grain of standardisation in education.
- An Indigenised curriculum that leverages the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP or approved learning frameworks for Early Years and School Age Care helps all students develop intercultural understanding and normalises the presence of First Nations content.
- Incorporating First Nations perspectives is good for all learners.
- When all educational staff gradually develop understanding of First Nations histories and experiences of coloniality, “recognition of the ethical importance of finding authentic ways to teach Indigenous knowledges” is nurtured (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020, p. 94).
- The idea is not to replace Western knowledge but to bring Indigenous and Western knowledge systems into dialogue such that worldviews are expanded, relationships are forged, and power imbalances are redressed.
- Educators can build knowledge solidarity by making genuine space for and valuing Indigenous knowledges while appreciating that despite the Western impulse to claim Truth, there are multiple valid ways of knowing the world.
- Cultural immersion programmes through workshops, camps or retreats can be particularly useful starting points for educators for the purpose of decolonising the mind to Indigenise curriculum.
- Country-centred learning led by local Aboriginal community members can awaken teachers’ critical awareness and assist them to develop holistic approaches to integrating First Nations perspectives (Burgess et al., 2022).
- Whole-of-school/centre incorporation of First Nations perspectives can and has resulted in quantifiable improvements across various elements of schooling (i.e. with respect to reduced suspension rates as well as improved literacy and numeracy testing outcomes).
- Relationships can be developed with First Nations’ families and local community/Elders with a view to negotiating elements of curriculum and learning to appreciate Country as curriculum – ‘Country’ is wherever you are.
- Appreciating Country as curriculum is appreciating that knowledge is not static or decontextualised but dynamic and co-produced in situ.
- Shared commitments to embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP or approved learning frameworks for Early Years and School Age Care, interpreting the APST focus areas 1.4 and 2.4 critically, and auditing curriculum to scrutinise whose voices, perspectives, and knowledges are privileged, serve as important momentum-building practices for schools and centres to slowly decolonise from the ground up.
- Historically, curriculum changes mostly occur ‘from below’, meaning that even when they are small, patterns of dedicated practice are important – they generate their own hopeful momentum, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP provides an important resource in generating broader-scale decolonising change across systems.

Pedagogy

- Pedagogy is not a one-way street but is relational – it is about learning *through* the development of respectful relationships between teachers and students, students and students, and students, teachers and knowledge, which is co-produced (including with Country/community).

- Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) starts with dispositional change on the part of non-Indigenous educators; “culturally responsive pedagogies do improve outcomes for Indigenous students, but only when those pedagogies also focus on changing non-Indigenous teachers’ attitudes” (Moodie, Vass, Lowe, 2021, p. 11).
- CRP involves developing cognisance of racism in its varied forms (including curricula exclusion), acting against it, and appreciating that there are many valid ways of knowing the world.
- CRP principles include:
 - building meaningful pedagogical relationships
 - offering high educational challenge (including intellectual, social, affective, creative, and embodied modes of learning)
 - having high expectations of learners
 - strongly connecting to students’ lifeworlds
 - viewing cultural difference as a learning asset
 - fostering a critically conscious/activist orientation – where taking ‘action’ may include, for instance, caring for a waterway, educating the school-community on matters of shared concern, etc.
 - promoting sharing of learning beyond the classroom
 - and enabling students to learn – and to express their learning – multimodally
- CRP is good for all learners. First steps can include creating genuine spaces for educational *encounter, relationship building and dialogue*, regardless of who is present.
- First steps also include creating shared conceptualisations of ‘success’ and expanded understandings of literacy and numeracy.
- The ethos of Catholic Education explicitly attends to holistic learning for all students, which resonates well with CRP.
- Overarching pedagogies that support First Nations and *all* learners, include (but are not limited to): Object Based Learning (OBL), Creative Body-Based Learning (CBL), Storytelling Pedagogies, and Rap/Hip Hop. These pedagogies form part of a rich CRP repertoire.

Relationships and Wellbeing

- It is crucial that schools and centres recognise the intertwined nature of ‘relationships’ *for* ‘wellbeing’.
- Wellbeing can be understood in terms *connections*: to Country, culture, family, community, spirituality, place, and identity.
- All educational staff can move from decontextualised understandings of wellbeing as located within ‘the individual’, to awareness that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing means the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.
- Aboriginal wellbeing is contingent on non-Indigenous peoples understanding that being Aboriginal within the context of settler-colonial Australia gives rise to ongoing, intergenerational trauma.
- Trauma-informed PL works to ensure that non-Indigenous staff are not sources of ongoing trauma for Aboriginal peoples, for instance, through unintentionally reproducing covert racism or pathologising Aboriginality.
- A crucial part of trauma-informed schooling includes partnering with the wisdom of First Nations communities.
- Schools and centres can become spaces that enable strengthened connections to culture for First Nations’ wellbeing, which expands to support everyone’s enhanced wellbeing.

- This can include (but is not limited to): connecting Aboriginal youth with one another (including across sites); creating dedicated Aboriginal spaces; connecting with Elders; creating opportunities for Aboriginal youth to engage in in/formal cultural learning activities; connecting with family, community, and Country; developing a strong First Nations formal education for everyone; re-designing behaviour management or disciplinary systems that exclude or are punitive to focus instead on forging relational trust, co-regulation/decision-making, and pedagogies of care; and understanding the reality of emotional labour for Aboriginal young people, which means that sometimes, Aboriginal youth may opt not to participate in dedicated cultural events or learning opportunities.
- Relationships between schools/centres and communities/Elders take time to nurture; thus, in their absence, or when starting out, it is important that teachers and schools/centres do not allow a fear of tokenism or lack of established relational structures to serve as reasons for doing nothing. Small steps count.

What the Roundtables tell us

Educational organisations comprise layers of leadership. Notwithstanding the pressures on education leaders to meet externally imposed policy mandates as well as local level community expectations, leaders – at all levels – play significant institutional roles in setting a tone for the discussions, practices, norms, priorities, and support structures consequently permitted or precluded (Eacott, 2018). Across Australia, within schools (and centres) but also within upper organisational structures, leaders with the greatest decision-making power tend to be white and middle-class (Corrie, 2021). Therefore, Australian educational institutions, irrespective of sector, can be environments where unintentional cultural blind spots may impact the leadership practice of those who are deemed to be ‘in charge’ of increasingly superdiverse student-community populations (Morrison et al, 2019).

Participants in the roundtable discussions drew from the Anglo-dominated mainstream and occupied numerous positions, either within the CEO or as leaders with various levels of authority in sites across CESA’s geographic stretch. Whilst an interview schedule for these discussions is located at Appendix B, given the way in which the roundtables were facilitated, all questions on the schedule were not covered in each session nor did each session cover the exact same set of questions – substantive conversation was encouraged in order for memories to surface and important lines of conversation to be explored in the manner of a professional learning dialogue. Hayes and colleagues (2006) say that where substantive conversation is present, “interaction is reciprocal, and it promotes coherent shared understanding” (p. 44). This was important for ensuring that partner insights were respected, and so that the research was not ‘done to’ but ‘with’ participants in the spirit of educational social justice (Griffiths, 2009).

Included below is an abridged and anonymised distillation of key information to arise from the roundtables, which is most pertinent to the Draft Strategy. Whilst direct quotes are generally reproduced verbatim, some editing is occasionally applied for readability, without altering meaning. All proper names have been removed.

Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

Two sets of ideas concerning Aboriginal Education emerged from the roundtable discussions:

- 1) Discourse One: Aboriginal Education as a discrete set of practices to support disadvantaged or special/additional needs groups. This discourse intersected with neoliberal ideals which typically position Aboriginal Education as a vehicle for supporting First Nations learners to better contribute to a prosperous (White) nation.
- 2) Discourse Two: Aboriginal Education as a complex and evolving set of practices, as much about immersing everyone in First Nations cultures, histories, knowledges, and ways of being as about engaging the dominant culture in uncomfortable if necessary ‘unlearning’.

The far majority of participants articulated understandings which aligned with Discourse Two, though it must be said, in the everyday life of schools, centres, and the upper-levels of educational organisations, Discourses One and Two intertwine for myriad complex reasons. As conversation unfolded, the roundtables became spaces where participants learned from and listened to one another, acknowledging blind spots and expanding collective awareness. In keeping with Discourse

Two, participants primarily discussed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in the following terms:

- Shaping everything we do (in the case of Early Childhood Education): “whether we have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children present ... It is ... how we embed [First Nations] ways of knowing, being, and doing in the everyday aspects of our curriculum ... So it just becomes part of everyday practice, everyday rituals.”
- Inclusion within a broad community, ‘growing one another up’ and engaging in “far more listening [as white people] than talking.”
- Entering ‘uncomfortable spaces’ as white people, engaging with communities beyond the school gates, engaging with diversity, and “understanding that it’s complex, it’s uncomfortable.”
- Accepting a messy, imperfect process of co-learning and committing to a long view.
- “Fostering dispositions of knowing [and] places of really deep connection.”
- Creating space for encounter and dialogue. “Fostering places of education that encourage different ways of knowing [and becoming] comfortable with evolving and shifting as a result of those encounters.”
- Moving from surface level or token gestures, such as displaying an Acknowledgement of Country plaque, commissioning a mural, or developing an Indigenous seed garden, to “building that into our everyday ... within curriculum [and] pedagogy ... Not as something that’s very obviously different for Aboriginal children, but as ... authentically inclusive and respectful and ... for everyone in the school community.”
- Recognising and valuing what learners bring to the learning environment. Understanding that not all Aboriginal young people are connected to their cultural heritage. Creating spaces for everyone to learn about and connect with the richness of Aboriginal cultures.
- Shared respect through centring First Nations cultures.
- Enabling young people to define success and hope and co-construct learning.
- Relationship focused and community centred.
- Acknowledging what is ‘missing’ in what we do, interrogating our blind spots.

A particularly strong contribution to the discussions centred on acknowledging the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal cultures connected to South Australian Catholic schools/centres, acknowledging the broad scope of CESA’s geographic footprint, avoiding “cookie cutter models,” and “being responsive to the diversity of communities and the complexities that exist,” from birth to post-school pathways.

Acknowledging cultural baggage and blind spots

Australian mainstream education has never served First Nations’ peoples well – Aboriginal voices, languages, worldviews, stories, and ways and being have been habitually overlooked within the context of formal Australian schooling. When white educators and leaders, who have been privy to such an education, fail to interrogate gaps in their formal schooling, they run the risk of reproducing what proud descendant of the Dja Dja Wurrung people of central Victoria, Dr Aleryk Fricker (2017) calls the ‘Great Australian Silence’ – a term originally coined by W. E. H. Stanner in the late 1960s for describing a ‘cult of forgetfulness on a national scale’ concerning the ways in which White Australia has harmed Aboriginal peoples and denied Aboriginal sovereignty. Fricker (2017) elaborates that this

cult of forgetfulness persists in school curricula and everyday educational practices which sideline or ignore First Nations peoples and content. In turn, these gaps become embedded as white 'cultural baggage' and blind spots (Ahmed, 2007; Schulz, 2017), which constitutes habits and comfort zones that fuel apprehension to embrace anything that may feel foreign. These dynamics are exacerbated by systems in which the school day is colonised by pressures to meet standardised mandates and accountability frameworks, or where open dialogue concerning challenging but necessary conversations – for example, about coloniality or Australian history – is avoided.

Roundtable participants spoke candidly about the failures of their own formal schooling with respect to First Nations cultures, knowledges, and peoples. A small number of participants recalled deeply powerful formal schooling experiences which nonetheless challenged this trend. And many shared stories of informal educational experiences involving encounters with First Nations peoples, which powerfully shaped their identities as educators.

Examples of formal schooling experiences that reproduced Stanner's 'Great Australian Silence':

My formal schooling ... was very much a white narrative.

There was no acknowledgement that people had been dispossessed, that people had been slaughtered ... it was absolutely missing.

It really wasn't until I started teaching ... and all of a sudden, the content involved Indigenous Australia and history ... The starkness of me not knowing that history and now being thrust into the teaching role ...

As an early career teacher, one of my first experiences was being given the buff-coloured laminated workbook, which was the Indigenous unit for a term in year 7. It was about the Pitjantjatjara people ... I remember feeling incredibly uncomfortable and being given this enormous responsibility and I didn't even know how to pronounce the name of the people on the front of the book.

I have not one memory of learning about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people at all at school.

I recall in year 7, in my public primary school, we had to do a project ... We had an option of studying the 'Aborigines' [sic]⁹ or studying China ... The teacher said, you won't find too many books about Aborigines, so do China. So, 30 kids and 30 China assignments all copied out of the encyclopedia.

I have some memories of curriculum content about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but ... it felt quite cold and distant, like we were looking at hand-drawn images of someone's experiences, just picking the bits out with no depth or story attached to them. I never felt connected with it.

We learnt about Captain Cook. It's shameful.

Example of a formal schooling experience that was powerfully affecting:

⁹ Note that this respondent was intentionally using language that reflected the tone of education to which they were exposed as a child, to underscore the inappropriateness of education informed by racialised language.

We did this activity where we were drawing a city on butcher's paper spread across the floor. We spent hours creating it. [Eventually], the teacher said right, you're all done? And we said, we're done. We were really quite happy with how it had turned out. And then he just picked it up, ripped it to shreds in front of us and said, that's the Invasion. It was so jarring. Imagine what it would've felt like to have had an established life and then all of a sudden, for many it was gone. And I actually did that activity with my pre-schoolers. It was a challenge to try and explain it to them ... [But] we started to talk, and I felt like it's something we needed to start talking about from a very young age ... And I did it in a sensitive way. The children responded really well, and they were open to it but ... I was then confronted by families and parents who felt it was totally inappropriate to talk about it. So, that was very challenging. [... And then] I ended up working with [pre-service teachers] talking to them about having these conversations in age-appropriate ways ... But the children were so curious and open and the empathy they felt. It really made me think, there's never too young an age to start to talk about these things. Why had it never been mentioned in all of my schooling?

Experiences of powerful informal educational experiences:

My informal education occurred in a highly racist community where people were marginalised, sorted, if they moved into town from a mission, they were not allowed to then have anything to do with their family. And the damage of that became apparent when I actually reconnected with some of those people when they were parents at a school where I was working. So, I developed an even deeper understanding of ... the challenges. Those horrible experiences ... [So, now I] align with the dignity and importance of every single individual ... that's where my priority comes from.

I use the term mission respectfully because that's what it was called [when I was] a kid ... My school holidays were spent playing with those children [from the mission] in our yard ... But of those people ... two thirds of them aren't alive now. We're in 2022. That's still happening. They grew up in the same place and did we have the same opportunities for the same outcomes? We didn't, we don't. ... I continue to have strong connections with Aboriginal families and have had that for generations.

In terms of informal education ... in a place like [XXXX regional town] if I go into the hospital or the legal office or the supermarket, I know that there is a strong Aboriginal context and community. There are things displayed in language Everything is available in culturally inclusive ways. There are proactive Aboriginal employment strategies ... The whole culture, community, what it looks like, sounds like, feels like is one of inclusion for all people. We could learn a lot from [that]. I've never walked into a Catholic school or a Catholic church that [... feels] welcome for people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

These recollections demonstrate, firstly, that formal schooling can reproduce white cultural baggage in ways that enculturate emergent generations into ongoing 'forgetfulness', misunderstanding or apathy concerning the ways in which White Australia harms Aboriginal peoples and denies First Nations sovereignty. But they also demonstrate that formal schooling can powerfully reverse this trend, albeit in ways in which are contested – (we refer here to the paper ripping exercise). Zembylas

(2018) says, “discomforting learning can be harmful, because there seems to be always some sort of violence done in the name of some ethical idea/principle” (p. 94). Creating safe spaces for professional learning is thus important, yet ‘safety’ can equally reduce important issues like racism or coloniality to the figurative or metaphoric, draining professional learning of necessary urgency or potential. In this sense, truth-talk is imperative, but the learning community must be brought along. Hence, ongoing and respectful dialogue is vital. Moreover, engaging with a multiplicity of First Nations voices through various media (i.e. film, poetry, art, memoir, documentary, narrative) that highlight First Nations’ strength, wisdom, humour, and tenacity is an equally powerful way of moving beyond viewpoints which narrowly articulate ‘Aboriginality’ together with ‘negativity’, to instead represent Aboriginal perspectives in their profound dynamism and diversity.

Secondly, the above excerpts illuminate the power of informal learning experiences which can enable, in distinguished First Nations scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s terms, ‘increased sociality’ (cited in Schulz & Fane, 2015). Increased sociality refers to the ways in which intercultural encounters between non-Indigenous (specifically white) and Indigenous peoples can provide opportunities for disrupting deficit assumptions of Aboriginality through forging relationships. Indeed, many white Australians form opinions of Aboriginal peoples in the absence of ever having met an Indigenous person, as illustrated poignantly in a story offered by one of the roundtable participants. In this story, which is worth quoting at length, the participant describes the impact on non-Indigenous grade three and four children who were connected with a local Aboriginal Elder through their Catholic school. The participant explains:

... the class did some work with a local Aboriginal Elder. She came into the school on a weekly basis over two terms. The principal got the kids to write a response to some questions about Aboriginal people; what do I think about Aboriginal people? [Their answers were] extraordinary. They were things like ‘Aboriginal people are dirty, drunk’ ... it’s quite confronting ... ‘don’t want to work, can’t speak English.’ And then, after the two terms, the principal got them to write, now what do I know and understand? And they wrote things like, ‘I understand more about who you are as a person. I understand some of your language. I understand about your land, about the water, the skies.’ I guess what I’m saying is, first of all, I couldn’t understand where year three- and four-year-olds got the idea about Aboriginal peoples being unemployed, dirty, mean, nasty. The language was extraordinary, so brutal and honest. And yet, two terms later, having experienced and been with Aunty, as they called her, you could just see this sadness in them as well, that they thought like that. But you could also see this beautiful growth and understanding. Where did they get those opinions from? Family, parents, from their own experiences in a very white, affluent area of South Australia?

Professor Marcia Langton AO (1993, p. 33), descendent of the Iman People, explains that the densest relationship in Australia is not between Indigenous and white people but between white Australians and their predecessors’ racialised representations – what we refer to in this report as deficit discourses. McKinney (2005) describes intercultural encounters, such as the one described above, in terms of ‘turning points’ – important junctures in white people’s lives that signify moments of consciousness when they gain insights into the racialised nature of their lives. For example, as one participant from the roundtables remarked, *we grew up in the same place [as Aboriginal peoples] and did we have the same opportunities for the same outcomes? We didn’t, we don’t.* Turning points

usually result from interactions with others who McKinney (2005) calls agents of epiphany; people who prompt a radically new way of thinking in a reflexive or self-analytic manner (p. 24). Both formal and informal encounters with Aboriginal peoples and knowledges are therefore highly important for learning communities who wish to become culturally safe. Aboriginal parents/caregivers consistently say that, above all, they want their children to attend culturally safe learning environments.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the excerpts included in this section demonstrate the power of creating genuinely dialogic spaces within institutions as professional learning communities. The conversations which took place within the roundtables were, as one respondent reflected, *conversations that I don't have a lot in my role, and that's just something that's going to sit with me for a while*. For white people, formal and informal learning experiences regarding Aboriginality are powerful driving forces in terms of how education is conceptualised and practiced, and how interpersonal understandings are either challenged or reproduced. By bringing these conversations to the surface within a professional learning space, educators are able to develop a 'shared language' (Hayes et al., 2006, p. 197) and common vision, which is foundational to connecting meaningfully with First Nations peoples as partners in the learning community, whether those First Nations peoples are staff within the institution or parents/caregivers and community. Moreover, such conversations can assist all members of the learning community to develop deep commitments to social justice as their starting point.

Understanding racism

Participants' frank and open reflections on their formal and informal learning experiences provided receptive terrain for discussing racism. Both the literature review for this project as well as earlier sections of the report establish that racism is a key determinant of educational experiences and outcomes. The literature also establishes that racism is deeply harmful to First Nations' and other racially minoritised learners in school and through the life course. Yet, the levels of racial literacy within mainstream Australia generally, and across Australia's majority white teaching force specifically, tend to be very low (Brown et al, 2021). Race theorist David Gillborn (2006) says, "it is of central importance that the term 'racism' is used not only in relation to crude, obvious acts of race hatred but also in relation to the more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the effect of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups," because this forces us to focus on "outcomes and effects rather than intentions" (p. 21). Lentin (2020) adds clarity by suggesting, no one would ever say, I didn't mean to hit you with my car, so I didn't really hit you. Put differently, even when racism is subtle or unintentional, it can still cause harm.

When invited to talk about racism and explain their understandings, roundtable participants were forthright:

Talking about racism within the context of education feels like uncharted waters.

Challenging, awkward, a taboo.

I don't think I've ever had a discussion with anybody about racism [within the context of education] in 20 years.

Talking about racism is ... largely absent but imperative.

People are afraid to express an opinion for fear of being wrong.

Despite apprehensions, roundtable participants variously disclosed:

I can't say that I've come across racism or talk of racism.

My understanding of racism is developing [... but I know that it] destroys people and communities.

To me it feels like a barrier to engagement.

I don't think we [as a sector] know what it is.

My understanding of racism is not fully formed.

My understanding of racism is limited by my own experiences ... and biases.

Some participants articulated sophisticated awareness:

In terms of racism ... there is a whole spectrum from 'it's just a joke, get over it' and 'I didn't mean to upset you' to the deep psychological and mental impact that it will have whether it's an adult or a child [who] will take it with them their whole life.

Discussion of racism did not tend to acknowledge its realisation through curriculum or pedagogy or whiteness as an enforced norm; however, all participants expressed a desire to move from lack of awareness or a passive 'non-racist' standpoint, to more proactive, informed, 'anti-racist' subjectivities, as captured in the following:

... one definition alone doesn't cut it. It's about being personally accountable for our own story and our own understanding.

Strengths and aspirations

In addition to interrogating weaknesses or areas that warrant growth, roundtable participants were invited to discuss perceived strengths as well as aspirations for moving forward as an education system that genuinely supports First Nations learners and communities. It was considered important to 'name' existing strengths given that, even small-scale, local efforts can 'link up' (Brennan, 2022, p. 88). Brennan (2022) argues that systemic educational change mostly occurs 'from below', meaning that even when they are small, patterns of dedicated practice across sites are important for generating momentum which can animate broader, decolonising change.

Key points from these conversations included:

- CESA's boarding programme: comment was made about CESA's three boarding schools, which make explicit efforts to nurture relationships with the parents/caregivers of Aboriginal boarders, inviting them to express how the schools can 'do better' and be more 'culturally safe'.
- Scholarship scheme.
- Supporting Aboriginal students with provision of a key teacher where necessary.
- Cultural immersion programmes for Aboriginal students, who are invited to bring a friend.

- Embedding relationships: participants noted that an increasing number of Catholic South Australian schools/centres are embedding relationships with First Nations peoples through reaching out to community and scheduling regular parent/caregiver meetings.
- SACE graduates: increasing number of Aboriginal students achieving their SACE certificate, which is celebrated ceremonially at the Art Gallery of South Australia.
- Aboriginal employment: a small but welcome growth in employment of First Nations staff.
- Cultural competency training: carried out at school level but also within the CEO.
- Reconciliation Action Plans: RAPs were mentioned frequently as important vehicles for initiating and sustaining conversations within schools/centres and with communities. It was noted that RAPs are increasingly considered important across CESA, “regardless of whether there are Aboriginal children at the school. It’s about raising awareness of the Country you’re on.”
- Artist in Residence Programme: repeated mention was made of this programme, not in terms of artistic products necessarily – i.e. baskets or paintings – but in terms of A) “the conversations you have, and the learning and relationships produced through those conversations,” and B) schools are increasingly taking carriage of the programme, reaching out and “making connections with artists in their own communities.”
- Visual representation and rituals: it was noted that many CESA schools/centres have normalised the practice of Acknowledgements (and, where possible, Welcomes to Country), along with displaying First Nations artworks, flags, Acknowledgement of Country plaques, Indigenous gardens, First Nations playground design, or co-designing school uniforms with First Nations students/artists.
- Participants also noted ‘on Country’ programmes for principals and teachers in regional sites which, whilst currently not operational, provided profound opportunities to establish relationships and relational trust.

In terms of aspirations, participants chiefly noted:

- The need to have a RAP in every CESA school/centre.
- Better supporting teachers to “build knowledge and understanding ... in partnership with Aboriginal communities and centres ... Building a bank of resources and cultural competencies programmes to build capacity for teachers, leaders and CESA personnel.” Noting in particular that “teachers are fearful of ‘getting it wrong’.”
- Becoming better at co-constructing learning with learners and better representing Aboriginality throughout the curriculum including, possibly, mandated commitments to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP.

Mostly, however, roundtable participants noted the need for CESA’s emergent Aboriginal Education Strategy to have flexibility and particularity built into its design to account for the many different First Nations cultures, families, and geographic contexts constituting Catholic Education South Australia.

What the Yarning Circles tell us

This section draws both from the yarning circles and parent/caregiver surveys. Surveys from parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in South Australian Catholic schools or centres returned 48 responses of which 30 participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (15 specific language/Nation groups were named but not disclosed here to protect anonymity), and 18 participants identified as non-Indigenous. Surveys were administered electronically and remained open September–October 2022. Three yarning circles were carried out with First Nations knowledge holders connected to Catholic South Australian schools or centres (specific language/Nation group names are not included here to protect anonymity), including parents/caregivers and graduated students (i.e. those who had completed school and were above 18 years of age, per ethical requirements). The yarning circles were carried out in September and October 2022 and facilitated by First Nations CIs Blanch and Buckskin with each circle including 5-10 participants who were remunerated for their time and energy. The voices of Aboriginal peoples in this section are no more representative of all First Nations peoples as the voices of roundtable participants represent all white people. The cross-section of voices that this report offers is triangulated against the literature review, which intentionally privileges First Nations' voices. Jointly, these data enable the generation of strong conclusions.

Included below is a distillation of key information most pertinent to the Draft Strategy. Aside from minor editing for readability, direct quotes are reproduced verbatim. All proper names have been removed.

Why Catholic Education?

Tiessen (2012, p. 3) says, understanding respondents', in this case, parent/caregiver and yarning circle participants' expectations and motivations for choosing Catholic Education is a fruitful area of inquiry. Respondent choices are rooted in expectations which, whether realised or unmet, play a significant role in shaping collective perceptions and the knowledge sharing about a site or system that is carried forward. In this way, if a school advertises that they will *nourish learners*, care for the *whole child*, and ensure that they are *part of a school-community*, it is vital that these promises are met. As one yarning circle respondent explained, 'transience' – moving between sites – is often a crucial form of survival for Aboriginal families. If an Aboriginal family encounters a culturally unsafe learning environment for their child/ren, moving away from the site of trauma towards the promise of genuine safety is part of First Nations parent/caregivers' ethical responsibility for the welfare of their family against a historical backdrop of trauma within White educational institutions. Of course, not all families have the power of choice. Thus, listening to those with some capacity to choose is useful for understanding the institutional encounters that all First Nations' families may nonetheless confront.

Respondents across the survey and yarning circle data sets were consistent in their reasons for choosing Catholic Education, with responses falling into three broad categories:

1. Community:

- The promise of being part of a community where education is valued.
- The opportunity to connect with extended family (Indigenous relatives and alumni being of very high importance) and being immersed in a family/community atmosphere.

- Desire for Aboriginal learners to be guided with love.
 - Assumptions that private schooling may be a better option.
2. Resourcing:
- Smaller class sizes, greater individualised attention, and support.
 - Established structures and stability (i.e. established connections between the school and community, investment in relational structures).
 - Scholarship scheme (for many, this was crucial for accessing the Catholic system).
 - Transportation options.
 - Location key to enrolment.
3. Values, ethics, and reputation:
- Christian identification.
 - Seeking to protect child/ren's wellbeing and social-emotional worlds.
 - Ethical impulse to be responsible for securing the best possible, safest education as a parent/caregiver.
 - Some sought a single-sex option.
 - Strong sense that education is highly valued.
 - Reputation of the site leader.

With respect to the last point, the reputation of the school/site leader, this surfaced frequently across the data:

The principal ... was amazing. He knew all the kids, he would have parent nights, pizza nights for the Aboriginal parents, to come together, talk and everything.

The principal there was amazing ... She was beautiful ... love, just very nurturing, happy, welcoming.

The principal ... he'd go out to communities; he'd do all this stuff.

Every organisation that we approach has a hierarchy. And ... you need to hit the top of the hierarchy ... it's just the way of the world ... it infiltrates down. So ... having that conversation with the assistant principal and the principal [is] vital.

What I'm finding, if the person from the top is racist, it filters down.

Understanding racism

The previous section flags the importance of safe educational environments which are characterised by an anti-racist ethos. Importantly, whilst some of the feedback from other data generation rounds (i.e. roundtables and staff surveys) indicated scant or limited understandings or experiences of racism, a different picture emerged strongly from the yarning circles. It is of importance that these insights are therefore widely heard and respected as an expression of what CESA refers to in its RAP as 'truth listening'.

Understanding the whole child:

There are two worlds that [my child] walks in ... When [they] leave our house, [they] step into a White world. And [my question for any school is] how are you going to make this a space where [they] get to see a bit of [their] Black world?

Because we're a minority, Aboriginal kids have to be competent in both worlds.

Our Black kids are very smart. They know how to walk between two worlds.

Our babies are Black, and they have to fit into the White environment, and that's a big thing ... our babies go into these schools where there's only a couple of them in there.

These excerpts speak to the need for educational sites to genuinely understand and appreciate the everyday experiences of being Black (in its diversity) in White Australia and the additional physical and emotional burdens that this can bring. As distinguished First Nations scholar Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson (1998) puts it, being Aboriginal within the context of settler Australia is traumatic; “few white people ever consider how stressful it can be for Indigenous women, men and children living in their country controlled by white people” (p. 39).

The above excerpts also highlight that incorporating Aboriginality into the context of education – i.e. visually in terms of murals, artworks, gardens, uniform designs and plaques, in terms of staffing profiles, and also in terms of curriculum and pedagogy – is part of creating a culturally safe environment where the First Nations learner *gets to see a bit of their Black world* and thus, gets to find a feeling of ‘home’; i.e. a place in the school/centre and curriculum infused with a sense of agency, strength, familiarity, and belonging (Blanch & Worby, 2010). Put differently, one yarning circle participant explained that when First Nations peoples get to connect, or when Aboriginality is proudly and positively represented, you get that *warm and fuzzy feeling*. This is particularly salient in light of the fact that there are so few Aboriginal educators or paraprofessionals in schools or centres who might otherwise occupy a unique position of being the link between worlds for Aboriginal children (Armour, Warren & Miller, 2016, p. 423). Indeed, Indigenous peoples are under-represented in the Australian teaching workforce to such an extent that many Indigenous students will not encounter an Indigenous teacher or school leader throughout their schooling years. It is thus incumbent upon non-Indigenous staff to do the work of making education culturally safe, which includes mindfully renegotiating curriculum.

Racism and curriculum:

Some [of the racism experienced by my child has been] attached to the curriculum ... [They] saw images of First Contact being celebrated ... a gun pointing at a Black person ... I said, “How did you feel?” [My child said], “I felt disrespected, I felt like vomiting.” ... [They] had to physically calm their body ... to see that image. [They] knew exactly what it meant.

[As parents] we're really angry [when our children are insensitively exposed to traumatising content or talk] and that means emotionally invested, every single inch of our body.

I think history definitely is very important and should be taught in our schools, but I feel like we need to do more than that, like we need to teach our kids, “Well, what is racism and why does that happen?” [As Aboriginal people] we know how to handle questions like, “Oh, so ‘how much’ Aboriginal are you?” But, if it's taught to everybody, and everyone knows, “Well, this is

the history and this is why [these different kinds of racism] happen” ... it could be more than history [as distant or dry facts], it could be unpacking so many different things of contemporary relevance.

I can ... align [our present experiences as Aboriginal people] with colonisation ... We can touch history, so don't say to my [child], “here's a history lesson that happened so long ago.” It still impacts us today.

These powerful excerpts illuminate the embodied experience of schooling for First Nations learners, which can be re-traumatising when handled inconsiderately. Attentiveness to such encounters helps to reveal “how deeply embedded harm, inequality and injustice are in the fabric of” educational life, with a view to transforming these injustices and enhancing shared understanding (Thrift as cited in Zembylas, 2017, p. 404). Incorporating First Nations perspectives across curricula does not mean avoiding confronting terrain – quite the contrary, and as First Nations voices repeatedly state, “teach our complete history [but] see your place in that history” (Moodie et al., 2021, p. 7). When educators work together, not as experts but as ‘co-learners’ with one another and with students, Aboriginal voices across the literature express appreciation that genuine efforts are being made.

Racism as stereotyping:

Some schools listen to some [First Nations] families and some schools don't listen with other families. They tag them, they put them in the too hard box or the uneducated box or this box or that box ... So, there's always stereotypes.

I said [to the school], “I don't know what your expectations of Aboriginal kids are ... But [my child] is an Aboriginal kid ... [and they are] not going to be a statistic. [... they are] definitely not going to be graduating to jail when [they're] 18. So, you are on this journey with me ... because education is the way for my child.”

Whilst these are but two excerpts removed from their contexts, they resonate strongly with the literature which highlights how entrenched deficit assumptions of Aboriginality are in Australia and how these deeply rooted stereotypes can manifest in non-Indigenous educators’ perceptions of Aboriginal learners, even if (or mostly when) unintentional (see for example Brown, Kaleda & Jones, 2021). For example, Dandy, Durkin, Barber and Houghton (2015) suggest that racialised expectations of Indigenous students’ academic performance are formed by non-Indigenous pre-service teachers before they set foot in the classroom (see also Moodie, Maxwell & Rudolph, 2019, p. 289). These deficit beliefs can be internalised by minoritised students (Moodie, Maxwell & Rudolph, 2019; Peacock et al., 2021; Prehn, Peacock & Guerzoni, 2021) leading to a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ of school failure.

Meanwhile, teachers may “attribute problems at school to home life and diminish the impact of their own assumptions about Indigenous ability” (Moodie, Maxwell & Rudolph, 2019, p. 273). Thus, if schooling is to be improved for Indigenous young people it is imperative that non-Indigenous staff confront these realities and reflexively work on dispositional awareness, especially in light of the demographic profile of most Australian educators, who are white (Corrie, 2021; MacGill, 2022). Given these realities, Aboriginal parent/caregivers may often find themselves in the position of advocating for their child/ren, which is but one dimension of cultural taxation (Hogarth, 2019). As several respondents across the data explained (the following being a composite of participant voices): *you*

have to choose your battles, because we have a very sacred tank of energy. We need to keep it there for our ... children. We need to save our energy for ourselves when we go out to the workplace or into the world to go shopping, even, because we fight racism every day.

Talking about racism at home:

We know the stats with black males ... in this country. [My child] was born immediately with a target on his back and he's still got that target on his back. That's just a reality ... which is why I'm so strong in his advocacy at school, wherever he goes, he needs to know that he has every right to be there.

[How I] manage situations of racism [in discussions with my child, I say] "what is racism? This is what racism is." I've drip-fed him, age appropriately, because it's a lot for a Black kid to learn ... So, I've drip-fed the lessons ... [but have] also created a home environment ... where we fuel pride and resilience ... I feel like talking about situations amongst children is so empowering because if they know that they're not alone in a situation, then there's a sense of relief that you're not the only one going through that. And there's almost a level of comfort that you can actually share your experiences ... "What did you do when he called you [a racist name]?" to the cousin or "What did you do when this happened?" So, that commonality, as adults, we share commonalities.

[The reality is that my child] is treated differently in society ... even with police. I say, "If you are with your white friends or your African friends, the police, regardless, will come to you two Black fellas because of the colour of your skin." And he'll say, "Why?" And I say, "Because that's the way they are because they think that Black people are always the mischievous ones. But we aren't." He says, "but I don't do that [be mischievous]." I say, "I know you don't do that ... But you'll always get tagged because of the colour of your skin."

The reality is, we can educate our babies. We can make them strong when they're in our care, but we've also got to educate them that being a person that knows their rights is going to get them in trouble later on.

I encourage them to have a voice, but I also educate them about zipping it ... When to zip it with authority, like with police.

[When speaking with education staff about issues of racism, I say] "I'm not [disrespecting] you, I'm educating you. Because you teach me things, or you teach my [child] things and it's about sharing information." [It's not about] common-sense. No one's got common-sense. You've got to educate [non-Indigenous people] about a thing like racism.

These frank disclosures reveal aspects of what it can mean to be Black in White Australia, and the normative parental/caregiver conversations occurring in some Australian homes, which constitute a blind spot or absence within the 'common-sense' world of many white people. McKinney (2005, p. 24) says; "whites generally receive few verbal messages from parents about what it means to be white" even though parental behaviour plays a key role in grounding ideas about race from an early age. White parents will rarely experience the need to talk about racism with their children in order to teach them how to navigate society safely. Yet, these are the common-sense discussions within many First

Nations' homes, which include strategies such as "code-switching in response to the demands of the White constructed discipline policy" (Llewellyn, Lewthwaite & Boon, 2016, p. 6) – in other words, learning when to 'zip it'. As learning communities that are predominantly White, schools/centres therefore have much to learn from First Nations parents who are the 'first educators' of their children when it comes to learning about racism. Whilst schools/centres must do the work of learning about these realities, and should never expect First Nations or other racially minoritised parents/caregivers to assume educational roles without adequate acknowledgement or remuneration, when parents do offer advice or open conversation with educational staff, as Ngugi Wakka Wakka woman and Academic Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland Professor Tracy Bunda says, these stories are gifts (see Phillips & Bunda, 2018). Or, as one of the yarning circle respondents suggested, *open your heart and be receptive holistically to what this person is talking about.*

Racism, love, and behaviour management:

Just suspending [Aboriginal students] all the time ... This is not teaching [them] anything ... You've got to find a different way to discipline.

[As a parent, I said to one teacher] when you drive past the prison ... what do you see the day prisoners doing? ... They are picking up papers ... all the day release are all Aboriginal prisoners picking up papers ... Is that what you are doing with [my child]?

Llewellyn, Lewthwaite and Boon (2016) explain, "Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are overrepresented in every negative indicator that is associated with student behaviour in Australian schools ... such as student suspension, attendance, expulsion, retention and achievement" (p. 6). Blanch (2009) adds, Aboriginal students, particularly Aboriginal boys, understand themselves as 'watched', which is rooted in coloniality. Many Aboriginal youth thus have deep lived awareness of Black bodies 'under surveillance' (Blanch, 2009, p. 91), and these negative assumptions, embedded within White disciplinary systems, are reproduced by schools that inflict harm when they interpellate the Black body as automatically 'problematic' or 'dangerous'. In reality, "it is well known that teachers are not adequately prepared to manage behaviours that may be culturally different from their own" (Llewellyn, Lewthwaite & Boon, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, Aboriginal boys are disproportionately suspended or expelled from schools in Australia (Graham et al., 2020), highlighting a limited yet dominant way of understanding violence or 'poor' behaviour as located 'in' certain bodies while structural and symbolic forms of violence, including institutional and other forms of racism, are habitually overlooked.

Llewellyn, Boon and Lewthwaite (2018) undertook a major Australian study within two faith-based education systems, including within the Diocese of Catholic Education Townsville. Of central importance in this Diocese was "ensuring that its schools, especially students, teachers and administrators, challenge the prevailing view that disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous students is 'normal' and that modest incremental gains are acceptable (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2012)" (Llewellyn, Lewthwaite & Boon, 2016, p. 6). Schools within the study sought to improve "equitable outcomes for its Indigenous students ... [through committing to the belief that] Catholic schools can improve outcomes for Indigenous students by ensuring that teachers

are equipped with an evidence-based repertoire of behaviour support and management skills that are effective in meeting their developmental and behaviour needs” (p. 6).

In their comprehensive review of the literature on culturally responsive ‘behaviour management’,¹⁰ Llewellyn, Boon and Lewthwaite (2018) identified eight criteria, which have been demonstrated internationally to be more effective and less damaging than punitive disciplinary models, by advancing a critical ethics of care. These criteria include:

1. Education staff must develop knowledge of Self and Other as well as the power relations in the socio-historical political context without a deficit notion of difference. Put differently, Australian educators must develop awareness of Australian settler colonial relations and the historical construction of deficit assumptions of Aboriginality.
2. Knowing students and their cultures.
3. Developing particular teacher qualities, which include the high expectations of the “‘warm demander’ ... a teacher stance that communicates both warmth and a non-negotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect” (Llewellyn, Boon & Lewthwaite, 2018, p. 6).
4. Building positive relationships.
5. Implementing culturally responsive pedagogy.
6. Building proactive behaviour management strategies.
7. Using culturally appropriate reactive behaviour management.
8. Building connections with family and community.

(Llewellyn, Boon & Lewthwaite, 2018)

With respect to the last point – building connections with family and community – it needs to be restated that there is no singular approach to ‘managing behaviour’ that is applicable to all First Nations learners. As many yarning circle and parent/caregiver respondents said, *Aboriginal families come in all shapes and sizes*. ‘Behaviour’ is a complex and emergent product and expression of individuality, culture, relational dynamics, and context. There is no singular First Nations culture, and Aboriginal learners are situated across a multitude of contexts. Llewellyn, Boon and Lewthwaite (2018) stress that when developing culturally responsive behaviour management strategies, schools and educators must work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families to identify “behaviour management practices [of the home] that positively influence classroom interactions” (Llewellyn, Boon & Lewthwaite, 2018, p. 19). This sentiment of co-owning and developing strengths-based solutions was also reflected in yarning circle responses; for instance, one participant offered:

Create the space and invite people in ... start brokering those relationships... [If] there’s Black issues at the school, you need to bring Black people to the table to help out.

Several respondents also offered that Aboriginal boys, particularly:

... need to be valued, treasured, and loved.

¹⁰ Behaviour management is the term used within Llewellyn et al’s (2018) study and is also used across much of the literature. We use the term here to reflect that reality, but also suggest that terms like ‘relationship building’, ‘co-regulation’ or ‘relational trust’ may better align with a strengths-based orientation.

Conceptualising educational ‘success’

When asked to explicate their vision of educational success, the term ‘safety’ emerged across virtually all responses amongst the yarning circle and parent/caregiver participants. For example, success was described as:

My child feeling safe.

Achieving their potential through culturally safe and knowledgeable schools.

To be happy at a school free from bullying and racism, to be safe.

Children feeling safe and supported.

A culturally safe environment where our children can grow to be proud of who they are and where they have come from.

When kids are nurtured, safe, listened to, and respected.

In addition to cultural safety as a leading indicator of educational success, respondents also expressed success in terms of:

- Teachers having high expectations of First Nations learners.
- The provision of anti-racism strategies so that students’ full potential can be realised.
- Children/youth being happy, enjoying learning, feeling loved, and being valued for their cultural wealth.
- Completing the SACE.
- Having post-school pathways in place.
- A holistic education that values students’ cultural assets.
- Being positively represented in curriculum.
- Social engagement.
- Development of applicable or ‘real world’ skills, for instance:

For me, the measurement of success around education is how it is going to support them to be a human being and an adult in this world.

[If] they go away from school feeling successful because they learned something that they’re going to be able to use in their everyday life, that’s what educational success is for me.

What my site is doing well

The following captures practices already occurring within CESA sites, which parent/caregiver and yarning circle participants described as being deeply valued. Respondents recognised and valued when sites are:

- Embracing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP.
- Incorporating Acknowledgements and Welcomes.
- Have developed (or are developing) a RAP, but specifically when the RAP genuinely includes Black families.

- Relationship building with families, which includes welfare checks.
- Cultural immersion days for First Nations students.
- Celebrating culturally significant days or events across the whole site (i.e. NAIDOC).
- Employing dedicated support staff for First Nations learners.
- Engaging all staff in learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and critical understandings of Australian history from First Nations perspectives.
- Artist in Residence Programme.
- Generating opportunities for student voice and expression (i.e. First Nations students designing 'hoodies').
- Actively promoting First Nations cultures – i.e. visually, through curriculum and via pedagogy
- When the school/centre leader invests in Aboriginal cultures – to reiterate earlier points, this is very highly valued.
- The development of Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) or educational modifications for Aboriginal learners – these are valued when they are not tokenistic and do not isolate the Aboriginal learner or institutionalise deficit presumptions of racial 'difference'.
- When student lifeworlds are valued educationally, celebrated, and positively recognised.
- Respondents expressed deep gratitude towards educators who humanise and love the Aboriginal learner.

Regarding the last point, whilst many respondents in the yarning circles and surveys expressed desire for more Aboriginal paraprofessionals/teachers to do this work, they also clearly acknowledged and appreciated non-Indigenous teachers who are doing this work well. For instance:

There's an Aboriginal Education worker [at my child's school]. She's non-Aboriginal but ... I would like XXXX to be acknowledged for her leadership, support and caring attitude.

XXXX is a credit and fosters education with my child's heritage.

XXXX is a credit to the school and strives to get the best out of [Aboriginal learners], I can't fault them.

How my site could improve

The following captures yarning circle and parent/caregiver survey respondents' aspirations for positive, strengths-based change across CESA:

- Bringing Aboriginal students from across all CESA sites together regularly to nurture cultural safety and enhance First Nations' pride and solidarity.
- Buddy systems for Aboriginal learners within and across sites.
- A strong desire for the Aboriginal Education Unit within CEO to be grown to include First Nations peoples walking together with non-Indigenous staff in a spirit of reconciliation, and a strong programme of ongoing Aboriginal Education focused PL for CESA staff.
- Employment strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across CESA sites (i.e. setting quotas).
- Clarity around who each site's Aboriginal Focus Teacher is.
- Clarity on the CESA website regarding the Aboriginal Education Unit, including contact people.
- More Aboriginal support staff across sites.
- More comprehensive connections with Elders across sites.
- Coordinated approach to teaching history from First Nations perspectives across CESA sites (i.e. consistent truth-telling).

- Incorporation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogies (CRPs) to ensure that learner lifeworlds are widely valued.
- Anti-racism strategies across sites.
- Positive disciplinary approaches that do not reproduce deficit conceptions of Aboriginality.
- Coordinated efforts across sites to dispel racist stereotypes and myths; i.e. the idea that *black fellas get free stuff*.
- Consistent approach to Aboriginal Education across sites to ensure that, if a supportive leader leaves, the positive relationships, systems, structures, and ethos that they have built is sustained.
- Provision of safe institutional spaces for Aboriginal learners across sites; i.e. Nunga Rooms.
- A balance between PLPs and social engagement*
- Expanded understandings of success*
- Incorporation of First Nations Languages*
- Trauma-informed practice – and in particular, understanding that Aboriginal learners may require healing touch*
- Dedicated commitments to Aboriginal families on the part of schools*

The last five points have been asterisked to flag the need for further elaboration. In terms of PLPs and social engagement, respondents expressed the dual desire for education to be modified to meet an Aboriginal learner's needs however, they also underscored the desire for education to enhance social engagement. The point to be gleaned is that while individualised learning plans can support a student's specific needs, individualisation (sometimes referred to as differentiation) can sometimes have an isolating effect, which negates the social function of schooling. To offset the latter, PLPs can be incorporated into culturally responsive pedagogical approaches whereby all members of the learning community (i.e., teachers, students, and community) have opportunities to learn about and from one another's lifeworlds. This ensures that learning supports solidarity and builds learners' social imaginations, whilst also recognising individuals as uniquely culturally located.

With respect to expanded understandings of success, respondents spoke most vividly about the differential impact of the NAPLAN on First Nations' learners:

When [my child] sees the NAPLAN, that's not empowering for [them]. They've got this label of NAPLAN ... by having those labelling tests and things ... that's not showing [them] that they're successful.

The NAPLAN is such a fractured system.

The NAPLAN is ok for some Aboriginal kids but for others, it's upsetting.

Many respondents also expressed a desire for Aboriginal languages to be incorporated into education, even if minimally. Respondents acknowledged the complex pressures already faced by teachers and were mindful of teacher burnout, but they also expressed a sense that teachers were not expected to be experts, but can value students' cultural assets as co-learners:

My baby speaks four languages, but they're not acknowledged in the school.

You're actually missing out on an amazing, amazing person if you [don't] see the culture they're bringing to school.

You don't know Kaurana language? That's ok, let's learn together.

With respect to trauma-informed practice, robust conversation surfaced in yarning circles around the politics of 'touch'. The following quotes bring this dialogue to life, and point toward the need for discussion with parents/caregivers to be opened out concerning the ways in which schools/centres can exercise an ethics of care and a pedagogy of love:

[Aboriginal children] gravitate towards love and affection ... love with boundaries and respect.

Black babies ... they need touch ... if they are upset ... they need touch because that's how we bring our babies up ... it's about reassurance.

It doesn't have to be a hug ... Develop your own strategy of ensuring that they're getting that touch.

That's what I really struggle with ... 'safe hands, don't touch' ... but they internalise it. "You don't want to touch me because I'm Black."

The thing with traumatised kids ... they'll think "what's wrong with me?" You know, if [they don't receive that touch].

Finally, participants recognised that some First Nations parents/caregivers or families may respond to non-Indigenous education staff defensively owing the long history of trauma for Aboriginal peoples that is associated with White institutions. In response, the message from participants was clear: we are in this journey together, commit to Aboriginal learners, see their future as bound up with yours:

They [Aboriginal peoples] might curse you a few times, but if you keep coming back, they will eventually think, "oh, that fella's alright."

What the Surveys tell us

Staff surveys

Staff surveys returned 199 responses of which four participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (specific language/Nation group names are not included here to protect anonymity). Most respondents identified as teachers however, participants also included leaders (at various levels), principals, youth workers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and social workers from across South Australia, with participants' tenures as CESA employees ranging from two months to nearly five decades. A copy of the staff survey questions is included at Appendix D. The following information is condensed to that which is most relevant to the Draft Strategy. Quotes are reproduced verbatim, or minimally edited for readability without altering meaning. All proper names have been removed.

Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

Several clear Discourses of Aboriginal Education emerged from the staff surveys, including those that were evident in the roundtables. These included:

- 1) Discourse One: Aboriginal Education as a discrete set of practices to support disadvantaged or special/additional needs groups. Articulation of this discourse surfaced in the staff surveys either via 'benevolent' (well-intentioned) or 'deficit' language. For example:

Aboriginal Education is understanding the indigenous [sic] point of view and the struggles they have.

They [Aboriginal students] require a lot of support especially to follow the school rules and abide by them.

- 2) Discourse Two: Aboriginal Education as a complex and evolving set of practices, as much about immersing everyone in First Nations cultures, histories, knowledges, and ways of being as about engaging the dominant culture in uncomfortable if necessary 'unlearning'. Being by far the most prevalent, we return to this discourse shortly.

Added to these broad frames of understanding, the staff surveys also included:

- 3) Discourse Three: Aboriginal Education as colour blind (i.e. when the need for Aboriginal Education is superseded by the assumption that fairness equates to providing everyone with the same, seemingly neutral, or unbiased education). For example:

I don't understand how their education would be different to other Australian or migrant education?

- 4) Discourse Four: Absence of knowledge or awareness of Aboriginal Education. For example:

Not sure.

I have little understanding.

Absolutely no idea really.

- 5) Discourse Five: Aboriginal Education as authentic only if delivered by an Aboriginal person. For example:

I don't think this is something that [non-Indigenous] teachers can or should teach.

Discourses One (deficit), Three (colour blind), Four (absence) and Five ('authenticity') are problematic for the following reasons, but it is also unsurprising they should surface given the aforementioned 'accumulated deficits' (Hardy, 2016) of Australian schooling, which means that few Australians have grown up with a strong formal basis in this area. Mentioned many times throughout this report and associated materials, Australian mainstream education has never served First Nations' peoples well, but nor has it evenly equipped non-Indigenous Australians with sufficient knowledge or understanding of racism, whiteness, or a strengths-based appreciation of First Nations peoples. These 'deficits' can manifest in problematic or limited understandings of Aboriginal Education, for example, as expressed most clearly in Discourse Four (absence) – the experience of having *absolutely no idea*. Such gaps and omissions are resolved through professional learning, collaboration, dialogue, and support.

The examples of Discourse One (deficit) listed above reproduce homogenous and deficit views of Aboriginality. As Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff (2017) underscore, deficit thinking is perhaps "the biggest obstacle to a more authentic manifestation of culturally relevant teaching in schools and classrooms" (cited in Morrison et al, 2019, p. 20). Discourse Three (colour blind) is problematic for advancing the assumptions that mainstream education is unbiased – in contrast, as Hradsky (2022) clarifies, mainstream education has long reproduced Anglo-Centric traditions – or that First Nations' peoples are the same as *any migrant group*. It is important for all Australians to appreciate; First Nations peoples are sovereign. Albeit unintentional, all non-Indigenous migrants to Australia, including white people who may have been here for many generations, benefit daily from Indigenous dispossession by participating in the ongoing colonisation of unceded lands. To put this differently, Indigenous peoples cannot 'go back to where they came from' (Pedersen et al, 2006), and whilst conversations of this nature can be extremely difficult for non-Indigenous Australians to embrace, they also pave the way for a more equitable education for everyone. To reiterate the CESA 2021-2022 RAP:

Reconciliation implies 'making right' or healing. Truth-telling is an important aspect of healing. [...] For truth-telling to be effective we need to practice 'Truth listening' [...] being open to sitting with discomfort and also hearing the call to action – responding with compassion rather than responding to discomfort. (p. 2)

Finally, Discourse Five ('authenticity') – the belief that Aboriginal Education should only be delivered by First Nations peoples – is common and in many regards, expresses respect. However, this viewpoint is also limited. If Aboriginal Education is understood to include the critical re-education of all Australians as well as the gradual 'browning of curriculum' (Fricker, 2017) to make it less White, then it is inappropriate to expect First Nations peoples to shoulder this responsibility, especially considering that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a minority. Such expectations are thus sometimes referred to in terms of the 'cultural taxation' of Indigenous peoples who are expected to resolve the ongoing issues of colonisation (Hogarth, 2019). The far majority of survey respondents nevertheless articulated strong resonances with Discourse Two; the understanding that Aboriginal

Education is *for everyone* and is as much about adequately representing First Nations cultures across schooling (literally and figuratively, in staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, culture, and visually), as about re-educating the dominant group, and is a field of learning for which everyone is responsible. For example, staff survey respondents variously noted (and it is worthwhile acknowledging the richness of these responses):

[Aboriginal Education incorporates] awareness and education of the history and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as the enduring racism and oppression they have suffered and continue to suffer.

[Aboriginal Education incorporates] culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy based on Indigenous perspectives that is designed to generate belonging, awareness, and reconciliation.

Using Aboriginal perspectives throughout the curriculum. Understanding we are on [XXXX] Country. Acknowledgements and welcomes. Having an Aboriginal person in our school to teach or share Aboriginal culture. Teaching the truth about the history of Australia. Having a RAP.

An educational practice and approach that intentionally considers the strengths and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as well as the challenges and biases they face due to the existing system and its embedded and often unconsidered racism.

Constant research, community consultation and collaboration, guidance from First Nations contacts and professional consultants, professional and personal development, ownership of Australia's history and truth-telling. Providing a culturally safe space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners and having cultural education integrated into daily learning, for all students. Plus connecting all students with culture and Country.

Education ... which strives to decolonise Australia by educating non-Aboriginal Australians on our colonial past and the impacts this has on Aboriginal people today and into the future, thus highlighting the need for systemic change in education, psychology, government policy, strategies, health, and well-being. At present I feel we are in the infantile stage of developing a curriculum and teaching strategies which engage and facilitate best learning outcomes for Aboriginal young people.

Exposure to the diversity of Aboriginal cultures ... building positive relationships.

Understanding the impacts of colonisation.

Treaty and Voice.

Celebrating diversity.

Resolving our internalised Euro-centric mindsets.

Acknowledging Aboriginal strengths and deep wisdom.

Integrated comprehensively.

... having visibility around the school which enables the whole community to see that the oldest living culture in the world is valued, respected and of interest to the people inhabiting it. It involves continual learning, being culturally 'fit', and updating your knowledge and understanding not just on educational aspects, but on current affairs that affect the Aboriginal

communities around the country. At a bare minimum, it involves everyone knowing why certain activities are practised – e.g. Acknowledgement of Country, Sorry Business.

Responses such as these were by far the most prominent with participants offering sophisticated answers, indicating deep knowledge, commitment, and understanding. While this may speak to the nature of the research tool – (i.e. surveys were optional, and it may be the case that those with existing interest chose to participate) – it also indicates that CESA has a broad base of experience patterned across its footprint. When invited to describe how professional learning (PL) or prior education had prepared them (or not) with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, it is also worth noting participants' responses. Here, it was striking the number of participants who stated the impact of one-off PL or retreats, as well as the deep influence of tertiary studies:

I took an Aboriginal studies undergraduate course at Uni. It was mind blowing and changed the way I view and understand Australian history. While working at the school, we had one PD about culturally sensitive practices. I feel like my undergraduate and post graduate studies have prepared me well however I am always open to more high-quality professional development.

A significant number of respondents disclosed that, owing to PL or other formal education experiences, which were *mind blowing* and *changed the way they thought*, they had thereafter taken personal responsibility to advance a decolonising agenda:

I engage in my own research through personal interest and commitment.

I have taken it upon myself to seek out personal professional development through readings, resources, podcasts, and conversations with First Nations families and within community.

My understanding comes from a desire to learn more.

I am always doing my own research.

Such comments resonate with the work of MacGill (2022) and Lowe and Galstaun (2020) who suggest that cultural immersion programmes such as workshops, camps or retreats can be particularly powerful starting points for the dual purpose of decolonising the mind to Indigenise curriculum. They also resonate with Hayes and colleagues (2006) when noting that “opportunities for professional development are a key aspect of teacher capacity building and [...] both internal and external professional development bring significant effects for schools” (pp. 196-7). Whilst these writers focus on schools and teachers, the point extends to centres and all members of a learning community. Indeed, more than one survey respondent spoke of the impact of a ‘whole-of-college’ cultural immersion day recently carried out at one CESA site, which comprises multiple campuses and hundreds of staff, where *every single staff member down to the cleaners* were included in the critical learning event. As noted earlier, patterns of dedicated practice can ‘link up’ (Brennan, 2022), one-off events can set a tone and provide a stepping off point for deeper work, and even survey respondents with limited understanding of Aboriginal Education expressed a strong desire to learn more.

Understanding racism

Participant responses concerning racism fell into three broad categories:

- 1) Discourse One: Minimal or no racial literacy. For example:

I have not experienced racism and it is not an area I would feel confident in teaching.

I do not feel confident to advance racial equity. Further information needed.

Where someone thinks one race is better than another?

Not 100 percent confident but I live in hope.

I would really like to have more programmes ... to help teachers in this area.

- 2) Discourse Two: Comprehensive, confident understandings which extend to include curriculum and pedagogy. We return to this dominant discourse shortly.

- 3) Discourse Three: Benevolent if limited racial literacy characterised by zero tolerance. For example:

Racism is ... usually because of skin colour differences.

Prejudice against a person or group based on the colour of their skin.

Racism for me is a form of bullying and one I will not tolerate at all. I can confidently say that as a school, this is something that I do not see or have not heard of happening.

Racism is discrimination based on race or racial group. We have a zero tolerance for racism within our school.

Racism to me is discrimination based on race or the colour of your skin. I am very confident to advance racial equity in my classes.

Discourse Three – a benevolent if limited appreciation of racism that is typically coupled with zero tolerance for overt acts of race hatred, is a useful starting point for developing deeper awareness that can manifest in anti-racist action. Given the extent to which Australian mainstream education systems are historically steeped in whiteness as an imposed norm (Lucashenko, 2020) – i.e. the ways in which often curricula excludes or sidelines First Nations perspectives, or how the whiteness of Australia's teaching force exists as an 'unspeakable norm' (Schick, 2000) – to reduce racism to 'skin colour prejudice' or something that one 'does not see', overlooks racism's multiplicity and prevalence. Discourses Two (high racial literacy) and Three (benevolent if limited racial literacy) nevertheless co-exist within education sites. Consequently, if schools or centres as professional learning communities create space for open and ongoing dialogue about racism, educators/staff with more advanced racial literacy may help to elevate collective awareness – this is a potential starting point.

The majority of participants offered responses that resonate with Discourse Two: comprehensive, confident understandings which extend to include curriculum and pedagogy. For example:

Racism occurs through a lack of education, lack of empathy, understanding and willingness to learn and listen. It is imperative that all people learn about and appreciate those who come from different cultures. The only way to achieve racial equity is through education not only of school aged children and young people, but also those from all generations before. To do this,

Aboriginal people need to be better represented in our society [at all levels] of the community without exception.

Racism is institutional ... It is about white privilege, inequality, and unconscious bias. Every Aboriginal person I know has experienced racism, and it is perpetuated in our schooling system. It is also silent, and uncomfortable, and leaders don't know how to deal with it, so they do nothing.

Not understanding, appreciating, or accepting the concept of whiteness and blind spots, which is still present in our strategies, policies, and systems. For this to change our young people who will become future leaders, doctors, policy makers, teachers etc need to be educated on this as many people today are still unaware that their blind spots and whiteness inadvertently leads to racism and continues to covertly suppress Aboriginal peoples.

Racism is both systemic and interpersonal. It's nuanced by small microaggressions towards people of colour, different cultures and specific racial groups. Racism occurs in all aspects of education as far as I can see. Culturally-responsive education is one way that we can support racial equity. Staff in all aspects should be doing their part to listen, step back, acknowledge, repair, and offer support. I feel confident in advancing education in this space – through truth-telling.

Racism is a social construct created by society in past history based on skin colour and the idea that people who were not white were biologically inferior. This has continued to create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on their race, due to the actions and attitudes of others and the systems and policies that are still in place in our society. I feel very confident to advance racial equity through education however, I am still not confident in the education system, for example the ATSI team in the Catholic Ed Office has slowly been reduced from a small group of people to two people and now to one person who also works in another area in Catholic Ed. This has had a huge impact on what is happening in many of our schools. If we are really serious about racial equity for our Aboriginal students, then this needs to be improved. I also have concerns about how well new teachers are being taught at university regarding racial equity. They have a much better understanding of the real history of Australia but still struggle to understand the life experiences of many Aboriginal students and how this affects their learning.

Encouragingly, these excerpts are a small sample of many similar comments, indicating a strong if dispersed racially literate staff base across CESA. Participants who drew on Discourse Three to articulate responses to questions pertaining to racism also noted how they *explore racism in curriculum contexts*, feel *confident that education is how we change deficit thinking*, have *many ideas how to advance racial equity through education*, feel *very passionate* about embracing an anti-racist standpoint, and *would like ongoing professional development in this area*.

Strengths and apprehensions

When invited to share what is working well at respondents' sites or what they are personally doing to advance a strengths-based orientation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, staff surveys

were rich with encouraging stories, which collectively offset the smaller number of apprehensions or concerns, evident in the following kinds of comments:

There is not much information or knowledge on this topic currently happening.

In all honesty, it's really hard when there are so many other things we need to be mindful about.

We don't have many First Nations people to assist us in our planning and execution of the curriculum.

We need more training.

I feel cautious.

I am nervous.

Limited [community] contacts hinder us.

We have tried to reach out [to First Nations community] but ...

I was highly offended by our professional development session.¹¹ It was a whole day of blame.

Comments such as these are both reflected across the literature¹² as well as understandable in light of the fact that, as noted, South Australian educators are under immense pressure with many reporting that they are 'at breaking point' (Windle et al, 2022). With respect to the final comment listed above, which provides a clear illustration of the strong emotion often associated with this terrain, it is common for pre-service educators involved in Critical Indigenous Pedagogies courses to experience sticking points, such as guilt, resistance, or anger, prior to transformation (Motta, 2013). Dependent upon their School of Education, pre-service educators are nonetheless assisted in this complex learning process, whereas, many in-service teachers have not had the benefit of similar, necessary support. This speaks to the need to create supportive professional learning communities (Hayes et al, 2006) at the same time as underscoring how culturally unsafe and re-traumatising it can be for First Nations' peoples to experience what DiAngelo (2019) terms white fragility:

... a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviours, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. (p. 54)

As one participant in the roundtables articulated, Aboriginal Education can involve entering 'uncomfortable spaces' as white people, engaging with diversity – including discomfiting or challenging perspectives – and "understanding that it's complex, it's uncomfortable." It is vital that non-Indigenous (indeed, all) teachers move beyond deficit, including resistant, standpoints and leaders must be supported by the institution to work with educators who sustain a deficit view. Added to this, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is experienced as 'something extra' on

¹¹ Involving Australian History from invasion perspectives.

¹² See the associated Literature Review for this project – specifically, the Preface and Professional Learning section.

already full plates, especially when borne by individuals who feel they are working in isolation (Hayes et al, 2006), attempts to embrace First Nations' perspectives are typically de-prioritised (Osborne & Guenther, 2013). When limiting beliefs – for example, that there are *no teaching resources* or that *without immediate community contact, nothing can be done* – are positioned in relation to the myriad positive efforts that are nonetheless occurring state-wide, this can build hopeful momentum and act as a unifying force. Indeed, the great majority of respondents to the staff survey shared powerful examples of the small but important steps they are taking, which collectively speaks to a budding cultural shift. Respondents spoke about *embedding* First Nations' perspectives across Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), English, Science, Maths, Drama, Art, Physical Education, and History. They remarked:

As the Science specialist, I teach First Nations aspects in all my curriculum areas ...

[I start with] respectful and inclusive language ...

I always share the Aboriginal language map showing which country we are on. I encourage and help students find information about their country if they want to know. We always have an Acknowledgement of Country in meetings and assembly etc. We have personal learning plans for Aboriginal students, and I try to find out about their history from their parents if they are happy to share.

I like to connect learning to locational experience, and the specific group of people that I am with at the time. [I focus on] learning and respecting culture from listening and talking to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I look for resources: i.e. NAIDOC week, ACARA curriculum, I follow protocols and try to engage in learning about historically significant events or sites: Stolen Generations, Uluru etc.

I try to foster positive relationships with the families.

I seek ways of integrating the perspectives across all the year levels that I teach so that the students can learn about and appreciate ATSI [sic] cultures.

As a teacher, I use my knowledge to develop units of work for my classes and to ensure each course I run includes First Nations knowledge. Examples of this includes understanding the importance of landscapes (such as Uluru and Morialta) in Yr. 8 and 10, land management/ environmental management using fire management in Yr. 10 and 11, Geography and factors that impact education and health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Stage 2 Society and Culture. As a curriculum leader, I ensure a range of new texts (digital and print-based) are available for teachers in my faculty that reflect a range of knowledge and try to support teachers to develop their knowledge so that they are more confident about incorporating First Nations knowledge into their own teaching. I also include Australian food plants in a community garden I manage on-site, with the next stage of the project involving documenting use, significance and naming that reflects First Nations knowledge associated with these plants.

First Nations knowledges inform my practice most of all by supporting critical thinking. Critical thinking allows me to pose alternative questions to students and broaden their understanding of Australian culture, history, and their community more broadly. First Nations knowledges also inform the cultural sensitivity and understanding that occurs in a multicultural classroom. It allows for a wider acceptance of minorities and diversity.

I actually challenge deficit thinking.

I raise awareness of appropriate resources, these may include specific case studies, film, music, and social issues. I direct students to information and knowledges so they may include Aboriginal perspectives in their work. I act as an advocate for our Aboriginal students. I encourage flexibility in teaching/assessments for our Aboriginal students to enhance their success. I actively create opportunities for our Aboriginal students to have a voice in a safe environment, for example, in Nunga Group.

Wherever possible, I involve local Elders and Indigenous families to share their stories and to support us in understanding the history, customs, and languages of our local First Nations peoples.

As a teacher librarian ... I showcase books by First Nations authors and illustrators ... We are supporting classroom teachers to integrate First Nations perspectives into curriculum by running library sessions alongside, e.g. currently Year 1 Seasons inquiry is focusing on Kurna seasons, so we are using stories and Kurna language and the Kurna weather wheel to support this.

As a librarian, I am decolonising our library.

[We learn from/with Country] using our senses to make sense of the world. Noticing the changes in the environment.

I embed First Nations perspectives and knowledges in all that I teach. I believe that it is only through genuine Reconciliation that this country will ever know peace. Our children must be taught differently to how we were for this to happen. They must know the truth, not the white-washed version that I learnt as a child.

Students are provided regular opportunities to explore their cultural identity and sense of belonging in their family, school and wider community. I regularly read and discuss literature by Indigenous authors and provide integrated learning opportunities celebrating NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week. Our history topic heavily integrates different perspectives on Australian history in order to develop thoughtful students and critical thinkers.

[At our site] the process has moved away from just cultural awareness to creating a safe environment. It means making the school environment feel safe for any Indigenous people in the [XXXX] community. The [XXXX] framework has a strong element of that [and includes] Indigenous artifacts around the school.

The last quote is pertinent for the way in which the respondent describes moving from 'cultural awareness' to 'cultural safety' as a whole site. In earlier responses, framed above as 'apprehensions', respondents spoke about failed efforts to connect with local First Nations' communities as barriers to advancing an Aboriginal Education agenda. In contrast, the latter comment about cultural safety demonstrates that, even if sites are struggling to connect with community, much groundwork can be done to create culturally safe environments, which are inviting. The section of this project's Literature Review on Relationships and Wellbeing speaks to this point, offering steps for sites to work towards cultural safety. Moreover, it is important to stress that teachers can establish a framework for learning that allows students to bring their cultural knowledge – their lifeworlds – to the centre of learning.

This is quite different to viewing First Nations culture as a fixed body of knowledge over which teachers must be experts or must find First Nations peoples to teach. Such beliefs tend to render teachers paralysed in their efforts to be culturally responsive. Instead, educators can create space to A) learn about the Country they are on with students as co-learners, and B) allow students to share their cultural heritage and existing knowledge about place.¹³ Certainly, engaging in Country-centred learning led by local Aboriginal community members is desirable, but in the absence of such relationships, or while such relationships are being forged, much work can still be done.

Once again, the above list is a small selection of the many potent examples shared by participants concerning the ways in which individuals, groups, and sites are making small but significant moves towards what may be termed decoloniality.¹⁴ Many respondents also noted that while *not much may be happening at the moment* or, *we've admittedly dropped the ball with this in recent years*, embracing First Nations' perspectives through centralising learner lifeworlds, negotiating the curriculum, and taking other steps to advance Aboriginal Education is *definitely something we are working towards*.

Aspirations

Staff survey respondents offered numerous ideas concerning what they would like to see happening or developed across CESA sites to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. Here is an example of the depth and detail that respondents offered:

Start teaching Australia's history through an Aboriginal person's perspective so that younger generation can understand the impact this has had, and why we need to make a change. It will also cultivate compassion and drive non-Australian people to reconcile the wrong doings. When I was younger the impact colonisation had on Aboriginal people was glossed over and British colonisation was glorified.

Truth-telling curriculum. A commitment to anti-racism. A commitment to reconciliation ... acknowledging wrongs and performing actions to reconcile, not just tokenistic gestures. The development of resources for staff to use. The commitment of funds and money to support educational gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The commitment of re-naming buildings to reflect whose land you're on. The commitment of training all staff equally so there's no lottery of which teacher a child gets. Clear communication to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and culturally appropriate communication strategies. Dedicated spaces in schools that are culturally safe – Nunga Rooms. Funding for First Nations Officers / Liaisons / Educators / Advocates across the country.

To condense respondents' ideas, the following is a representative list of aspirations for change, with the most common responses listed first:

- Committed, ongoing PL – both externally offered (advertised via CEO) and in-house.
- Development of a resources bank managed by CEO.

¹³ See the Literature Review section on 'Pedagogies' for further information pertaining to these points; also see <https://culturallyresponsivepedagogy.com.au/>.

¹⁴ We use the phrase 'moving towards' decoloniality in light of the contested nature of this term (see for example, Andreotti, 2011; Schulz & Agnew, 2020).

- Strategy to employ First Nations staff within the CEO.
- All schools implementing a RAP.
- Regular focus teacher meetings.
- More Aboriginal Education focus teachers.
- Funding directed to Aboriginal Education initiatives.
- Anti-racism strategies across CESA sites.
- Place-Based History units developed at the local level.
- Compulsory units across year levels.
- Trauma-informed PL.
- CRP PL.
- Acknowledgement of whiteness.
- Prioritising learner voice.
- Aboriginal languages in Catholic Schools (i.e. Kurna language).
- Immersion programmes for staff and students.
- Tailoring the LLL survey to incorporate a First Nations focus.
- Discussion circles normalised within sites to talk about History from invasion perspectives, coloniality, racism, and the role of the Catholic Church in colonisation.
- Integration of CESA's different strategies.
- Increased visual representation of Aboriginality across all sites.
- Employment strategy for Aboriginal peoples across sites.
- Buddy systems, on-Country camps, PLPs for First Nations learners.
- Continuation of Artist in Residence Programme.
- Time for planning for educators.
- Post-school pathways clearly established for Aboriginal learners.
- Master of Education pathway options for teachers wishing to deepen their knowledge with view to adopting lead teacher role.
- Moving beyond tokenism.

In view of the latter, 'fear of tokenism' is mentioned across the data as well as across the literature. Whilst we note that shallow or tokenistic representations of Aboriginality are problematic and, as some writers argue, may do more harm than good (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth as cited in Thorpe et al., 2021; Zubrick et al. as cited in Maxwell et al., 2018), we are also mindful that fear of 'being seen as tokenistic' often results in paralysis when educators/sites consequently do nothing. To move beyond a stuck position, Neagle (2019) says:

I encourage teachers to get rid of the word 'tokenism' [...] At its best, it dismisses an act or gesture before one even has a chance to analyse its value (or lack thereof). At its worst, the word allows many thousands of teachers to continue to teach the Anglo-Australian content with which they are most comfortable and continue to exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. (p. 22)

Shared commitments to embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP, interpreting the APST focus areas 1.4 and 2.4 critically, auditing curriculum to scrutinise whose voices, perspectives, and knowledges are privileged (Madsen et al., 2021), using culturally responsive pedagogies to bring learner lifeworlds to the centre of learning, and engaging in dialogic learning are all starting points

that can serve as important momentum-building practices for schools and centres to slowly decolonise from the ground up.

At this point, it is salient to incorporate complementary data from the teacher and leader PL workshops, which were carried out on two separate occasions at the CEO in November 2022. Teachers articulated the ‘apprehension’ or fear that leaders would not *be on board* with their desires to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. In their workshops, leaders articulated the ‘apprehension’ or fear that teachers would not *be on board* with their desires to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. Opening **dialogue** about such apprehensions may therefore serve to naturally transform apprehensions into shared aspirations.

Aboriginal parent/caregiver surveys

Surveys of parent/caregivers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in South Australian Catholic schools or centres returned 48 responses of which 30 participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (15 specific language/Nation groups were named but not disclosed here to protect anonymity), and 18 participants identified as non-Indigenous. A copy of the parent/caregiver survey questions is included at Appendix D. Responses to this survey are incorporated into the Yarning Circles section of this report for cogency and owing to parallels between these data sets.

Conclusion

Aboriginal Australian young people, their families, and communities have been intergenerationally underserved by the nation's formal education systems. Aboriginal voices have habitually gone unheard, or when they have been invited, genuine policy and system-wide change has too infrequently followed. What is really at stake when discussing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is that institutionalised and systemic forms of racism underpin the myriad lived realities of race in Australia, including that Aboriginal children continue to die at nearly three times the rate of non-Indigenous children, and Aboriginal youth constitute approximately 80% of those in youth detention (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). Whilst formal educational systems, including Catholic Education systems, have been implicated in reproducing colonial harms, they are also spaces where these historical patterns can and must be reversed. Education is a key vehicle for expanded life choices, chances, relationship building, and social reconstruction, and Catholic Education South Australia has committed to equitable change.

This report demonstrates that now is not only a unique time in history on the national stage for advancing Indigenous rights, but an opportune moment for CESA to formalise its Aboriginal Education Strategy. The report spotlights a system where a groundswell of goodwill and ethical commitments are already well established, for which CESA can be proud. It demonstrates that CESA has a strong base of dedicated and racially literate staff patterned across its footprint, who are individually and as whole sites engaged in powerful forms of culturally responsive practice. The report floodlights these successes as a momentum-building strategy whilst also being explicit about areas for growth. Of note, the privileging of First Nations voices is a theme that runs through this report and associated materials. The report does so to emphasise that new possibilities exist for everyone if we more fully embrace the knowledge, wisdom, and experiences that First Nations peoples and communities offer. CESA can be a leader in this field by taking the important and necessary next steps outlined in this report, which promise to enrich the entire system.

Recommendations

Based on triangulation of data covered in this Report, the research-consultancy makes the following recommendations for a 10-year Aboriginal Education Strategy. A 10-year strategy (2024-34) is recommended for two reasons: the Strategy is about cultural change; it is also grounded in relationship building and professional learning, all of which take time. Recommendations that are adopted are substantiated by the research base. Once steps are widely discussed across CESA, agreed upon, and adopted, internal timelines and reviews can be applied that are negotiated at the local level for feasibility and sustainability. The key areas for recommended growth relate to:

1. CEO Aboriginal Education Unit
2. Cultural Responsivity
3. Racial Literacy
4. Leaders
5. Educators
6. Learners
7. Curriculum
8. Pedagogy
9. Relationships and Wellbeing
10. Tracking and Celebrating Success

1. CEO Aboriginal Education Unit

Core Principle: The CEO Aboriginal Education Unit is widely recognised by CESA staff, parents/caregivers and community as serving at least two important roles: Supporting educators and sites to advance Aboriginal Education; setting a high standard by championing CESA's Aboriginal Education agenda.

Practical Steps. In addition to the work that the Unit is already doing, the report recommends that the CEO support the Aboriginal Education Unit to:

- a) Establish goals and timelines to grow the Unit, employing new and/or seconding existing First Nations educators/paraprofessionals from within CESA to help drive The Strategy as a clear expression of reconciliation, and to deepen relational trust with First Nations communities.¹⁵
- b) Develop the CESA website to host a dedicated space for the Aboriginal Education Strategy. This portion of the site should be easily accessible to accommodate parents/caregivers, community, and staff (with varying familiarity with SAE). It should include an Aboriginal Education portal to house a growing collection of teaching resources. It should ideally include an emergent cache of case study 'success stories' that showcase examples of Aboriginal Education that are occurring across CESA sites – such stories serve to build momentum and grow a professional learning culture. This part of the website should also provide clear contact details for the Aboriginal Education Unit.
- c) Develop a yearly programme for Aboriginal Education focus teachers. This programme should include provision of targeted PL (in-house and external) as well as opportunities to share practice and engage in dialogue as a professional learning community focused on internal capacity building.

¹⁵ In addition to culturally responsive PL for all educational staff, having a culturally diverse workforce is an important driver for ensuring high-quality, equitable, and culturally safe education and educational cultures. Setting targets and quotas to employ more First Nations teachers/paraprofessionals to drive the Aboriginal Education Strategy at all levels of CESA emerges strongly across the data for this study and is reinforced by the literature.

- d) Establish a term-by-term programme for bringing First Nations learners from across CESA sites together for cultural immersion experiences and networking opportunities. This is important for promoting Aboriginal cultural pride while building cultural safety.

2. Cultural Responsivity

Core Principle: First Nations cultures are diverse, and Aboriginal learners are located across a diversity of geographic sites and communities that are themselves increasingly superdiverse. Cultural responsivity underscores the notion that all learners thrive when their lifeworlds are brought to the centre of learning and recognised as rich learning assets.

Practical Steps: the report recommends that the CEO Aboriginal Education Unit support CESA educators and paraprofessionals by:

- a) Engaging Aboriginal Focus Teachers and paraprofessionals from across CESA in an initial PL event to launch the Strategy. This event should ground understandings in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education philosophy and culturally responsive practice.
- b) Thereafter, the Aboriginal Education Unit should work toward developing an induction PL programme to be hosted on the CESA website for new Aboriginal Focus Teachers and paraprofessionals. This induction programme is about local capacity building that grounds understandings in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education philosophy, and culturally responsive practice.
- c) Short case studies of culturally responsive practice should be developed by Aboriginal Focus Teachers on an annual basis and provided to the Aboriginal Education Unit, to be added to the case study collection.

3. Racial Literacy

Core Principle: Racism is a key determinant of educational experiences and outcomes and is deeply harmful to First Nations' learners within schooling and throughout the life course. Yet, the levels of racial literacy amongst Australia's majority white teaching and educational leadership force tends to be far lower than that of Indigenous and other racial minority staff, learners, parents/caregivers, and communities. Aboriginal voices consistently call for this to change.

Practical Steps: Racial literacy learning is an ongoing process that can be embedded across existing as well as built into new PL structures. The report recommends:

- a) All sites to receive copies of the Literature Review document, which includes a comprehensive overview of racial literacy as well as extended glossary for educational purposes.
- b) The Aboriginal Education Unit should develop an anti-racism strategy informed by racial literacy, to be incorporated into CESA's next iteration of its Reconciliation Action Plan.
- c) The Aboriginal Education Unit should thereafter support all CESA sites to develop RAPs which incorporate anti-racism strategies, informed by racial literacy.

4. Leaders

Core Principle: Whilst early learning sites in Australia tend to be characterised by a more culturally diverse staff and leadership, it remains that most Australian school leaders are white and middle-class. Yet, Australian learners and their communities are growing superdiverse, including within

the context of many CESA sites. First Nations parents/caregivers look to site leaders to assess the suitability and safety of the site for their child/ren. Culturally responsive leaders are highly valued by Aboriginal parents/caregivers. Such leaders are reflexively self-aware, share power, and build inclusive cultures across schools/centres and communities. Leaders must be supported by the institutional hierarchy to do this work.

Practical Steps:

- a) Ensure that all sites have an Aboriginal Education focus teacher.
- b) Ensure that parents/caregivers know who the Aboriginal Education focus teacher is.
- c) Provide time for the Aboriginal Education focus teacher to participate in the CEO Aboriginal Education Unit yearly programme and associated tasks (see point 1, sub-points c and d).
- d) Ensure that the Aboriginal Education focus teacher and Aboriginal paraprofessional staff have time to engage in relationship building with Aboriginal students, their parents/caregivers, and community.
- e) Leaders across CESA sites should develop and commit to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employment strategy.
- f) Site leaders should support First Nations staff to be accelerated through the institutional hierarchy, for instance by supporting the attainment of highly accomplished and lead teacher status for Aboriginal educators.¹⁶
- g) Site leaders should, where possible, implement a ‘both ways’ leadership approach that includes Aboriginal community and student involvement in decision-making and development of local site plans.
- h) Site leaders should commit to regular in/formal meetings with Aboriginal parent/caregivers and students to support equality of voice. This involves creating space for listening to Aboriginal peoples.
- i) Site leaders should endeavour to build inclusive cultures in which all staff are permitted, encouraged, and supported to have courageous conversations about issues such as racism and to engage in whole school/centre ongoing PL that supports growth in this area.
- j) Site leaders should commit to allocating resources to support activities that centralise the needs and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and their communities.
- k) Site leaders should be supported by the CEO to engage in trauma-informed PL, as requested by Aboriginal voices within this project and across the literature.
- l) Site leaders should work with and support key staff within their sites to co-develop culturally responsive behaviour management strategies with First Nations learners, parents/caregivers, and communities. Such strategies must be underpinned by the awareness that punitive disciplinary models are known to be culturally unsafe.

5. Educators

Core Principle: As with leaders, most Australian teachers are white. Non-Indigenous educators can and do make a positive difference in the lives of First Nations learners and their communities, but to do so must first move beyond deficit ways of thinking and commit to social equity. In contrast to Australia’s non-Indigenous (predominantly white) teaching fraternity, Indigenous peoples are seriously under-represented in the Australian teaching workforce, despite being in a unique position to be the link between worlds for First Nations learners.

¹⁶ <https://www.trb.sa.edu.au/Transforming-Teacher-Registration#HALT>.

Practical Steps: Starting with this knowledge widely understood, and being mindful that the Literature Review document provides detailed additional advice for educators, the report recommends:

- a) All CESA educators, regardless of where they teach, who they teach, or what they teach, should start with appropriate terminology, and seek advice if they are unsure which language is appropriate within their site. The Literature Review document includes a resources suite with links to Appropriate Terminology Guides.
- b) All CESA educators should know which Country they are on and incorporate co-learning about Country and local protocols into their teaching.
- c) All CESA educators should proactively choose PL that supports them to gradually build their own and others' racial literacy and understandings of Aboriginal Education philosophy and culturally responsive practice.
- d) All CESA educators should make proactive pedagogical and curriculum choices that centre First Nations voices.
- e) CESA teacher librarians can focus on decolonising site libraries/resources to support educators to centre First Nations voices and perspectives.
- f) All CESA educators can strive to make connections with Aboriginal parents/caregivers and communities, including by reaching out informally.
- g) All CESA educators can strive to value learners' lifeworlds and bring learner lifeworlds to the centre of their teaching.

6. Learners

Core Principle: It is important for all educational staff to appreciate that not all First Nations learners are the same. Not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students learn the same way. There is no 'one way' to teach Aboriginal students. Teachers may not know if they have Aboriginal students in their presence – it is the right of Aboriginal peoples to decide when or if to self-identify as First Nations. Learning to listen to and learn from Aboriginal students (indeed all learners) is a starting point for educational staff to establish an ethic of care that underpins successful learning and relational trust.

Practical Steps: Key steps for working ethically and respectfully with First Nations learners is incorporated into step 9 – Relationships and Wellbeing. In addition to these points, all educational staff can start by understanding:

- a) Aboriginal students may or may not be deeply connected to their Aboriginal cultural heritage owing to the impacts of colonisation.
- b) Some Aboriginal young people are not connected to their Aboriginal cultural heritage and may feel a sense of loss or shame about these intergenerational disconnections over which they have had no control.
- c) It is inappropriate to automatically position Aboriginal students as experts on Aboriginality – they may be learning too. Be a co-learner with students and their families.
- d) Urban, rural, and regional Aboriginal students will have different experiences of Aboriginal identity. All experiences of Aboriginal identity are authentic.
- e) Successful learning for Aboriginal students must involve curriculum and pedagogy that respectfully represents Aboriginality as heterogenous, evolving, empowered, and dynamic.
- f) The exclusion, underappreciation, or misinterpretation of Aboriginality in curricula and pedagogy can be experienced by Aboriginal learners as 'everyday' or covert forms of racism, which are deeply damaging.

7. Curriculum

Core Principle: Curriculum is a site of negotiation and a potential site for decolonisation. The AC version 9.0 and Early Years/School Age Care Learning Frameworks V2.0 ask all educators to strengthen their commitments to First Nations perspectives and languages. An Indigenised curriculum that leverages the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP or approved learning frameworks for Early Years and School Age Care helps all students to develop intercultural understanding and normalises the presence of First Nations content. Incorporating First Nations perspectives is good for all learners at all levels of learning. This includes learning on and with Country.

Practical Steps:

- a) All CESA sites should develop site-level commitments and accountability systems to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP; embrace the Approved Learning Frameworks Version 2.0 (for Early Learning and School Age Care) vision for strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives; interpret the APST focus areas 1.4 and 2.4 critically (see the Literature Review document); and audit curriculum to understand whose voices, perspectives, and knowledges are privileged.
- b) All CESA sites can work towards building relationships with First Nations' families and local community/Elders with a view to negotiating elements of curriculum and learning to appreciate Country as curriculum – 'Country' is wherever you are.

8. Pedagogy

Core Principle: Pedagogy is relational. Fundamentally, pedagogy is about learning *through* the development of respectful relationships between educators and learners, learners and learners, and the knowledge that learners and educators co-produce in-context/with Country. Culturally responsive pedagogy is good for all learners. It involves creating educational contexts that allow for respectful encounters between people, relationship-building, rich dialogue, and deep listening 'with' culturally located individuals. The ethos of Catholic Education explicitly attends to holistic learning for all students, which resonates well with cultural responsiveness.

Practical Steps: all educators can:

- a) Build meaningful pedagogical relationships.
- b) Have high expectations of First Nations learners.
- c) Strongly connect to learners' lifeworlds as a core element of teaching and learning.
- d) View cultural difference as a learning asset.
- e) Foster social relations between learners, and between learners and Country.
- f) Be co-learners with students about Aboriginal perspectives, languages, and Country.
- g) Promote the sharing of learning beyond the classroom/centre.
- h) Enable students to express their learning multimodally.
- i) Develop shared understandings of educational success with learners.
- j) Value expanded understandings of literacy and numeracy (see the Literature Review document for balanced approaches to literacy and numeracy).
- k) Ensure that Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for Aboriginal learners are contextualised within culturally responsive learning environments that support enhanced sociality and relationship building.

9. Relationships and Wellbeing

Core Principle: Relationships are central to wellbeing for First Nations peoples. Wellbeing can be understood in terms connections to Country, culture, family, community, spirituality, place, and identity. All educational staff must move from narrow understandings of wellbeing as located within ‘the individual’, to awareness that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing means the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. Moreover, Aboriginal wellbeing is contingent upon non-Indigenous peoples ensuring that they are not sources of ongoing trauma for Aboriginal peoples, for instance, through unintentionally enacting covert racism. Thus, First Nations’ wellbeing is contingent on the commitments and critical re-education of non-Indigenous Australians.

Practical Steps:

- a) All CESA sites should commit to audits to ensure that Aboriginality is positively and widely represented at their site: i.e. visually in terms of murals, artworks, gardens, uniform designs and AoC plaques, in terms of staffing profiles and/or targets and quotas, and also in terms of curriculum and pedagogical commitments.
- b) Ensure that all CESA sites are utilising Appropriate Terminology guides and have Kurna Dictionaries (or local language group resource materials where possible).
- c) All CESA sites should commit to key staff undertaking trauma-informed PL.
- d) All CESA sites should work together (with support from the CEO) to regularly connect Aboriginal youth with one another within and across sites.
- e) All CESA sites should create dedicated Aboriginal spaces (i.e. Nunga Rooms).
- f) All CESA sites should commit to connecting with local Elders, families, communities, and Country.
- g) All CESA sites should create opportunities for Aboriginal youth to engage in in/formal cultural learning activities and networking opportunities.
- h) All CESA sites should develop a strong First Nations formal education for everyone.
- i) All CESA sites should work with First Nations parents/caregivers to develop local strategies to ensure that First Nations learners are guided with love (in particular, see The Report for advice concerning the politics of touch).

10. Tracking and Celebrating Success

Core Principle: Mainstream or formal Australian education systems typically track success using measures and tools that are grounded in Anglo-Centric languages, worldviews, and ways of being. Aboriginal peoples express the desire, and have an inalienable right, to be supported to be successful via these mainstream measures. However, successful schooling systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and their families are also those which embrace expanded, culturally responsive, and contextualised measures of success, which are co-developed at the local level. Furthermore, First Nations’ voices within this study and across the literature foreground cultural safety as a key measure of educational success for all First Nations learners.

Practical Steps:

- a) Continue to commit to improving formal measures of educational success, including literacy and numeracy outcomes, and SACE completions for First Nations learners across CESA sites.
- b) Provide tailored support such as PLPs to enhance Aboriginal learners’ outcomes on standardised measures.
- c) All CESA sites should commit to becoming culturally safe as a foundation for educational success, by following the practical steps laid out at step 9 – Relationships and Wellbeing.

- d) CESA secondary school sites should incorporate post-school pathways for Aboriginal learners, and celebrate alumni achievements, as a marker of success.
- e) All CESA sites can develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies/quotas as a marker of success.
- f) Existing CESA survey tools (i.e. LLL survey and Classroom Pulse Check) may be modified to incorporate a First Nations focus.
- g) Educational success across CESA sites may be informally gauged through cultural outreach and relationship-building activities that create ongoing space for First Nations voices, i.e. lunches, dinners, tea and coffee with Aboriginal parents/caregivers and community.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Glossary of key terms/concepts

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people(s)** We use the terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (recognising that an individual may belong to both groups), Aboriginal, Indigenous, and First Nations somewhat interchangeably, though problematically. These terms are located within contested power relations and tend to “homogenise the multiculturalism and multilingualism of Aboriginal peoples” (Carey, 2008, p. 8). Carey asserts the possibility of resisting the colonising impulse associated with such terms by investing them with new meanings that subvert white supremacy. In the context of these relations, we use the abovementioned collective terms whilst recognising the processes of raced domination inherent in them and, where appropriate, use specific names; for instance, Kurna, Peramangk, Bindjali. It should be noted, however, that to retain the anonymity of Aboriginal knowledge holders who have contributed to the research which informs this report, sometimes collective names such as First Nations are used.
- Aboriginality** Similar to whiteness, which denotes racialised structural relations within which ‘white’ people are differentially if collectively positioned, Aboriginality is used here, not to homogenise First Nations multiculturalism and multilingualism but to signal the collective positionality of First Nations peoples – at once sovereign whilst colonised. It must be recognised that the idea of ‘Aboriginality’ did not exist in 1788 “but was invented by the invaders” (Hollinsworth, 1992, p. 138). Aboriginality as such is contested, evolving, and produced through dynamic interactions between Aboriginal and White societies – what Hollinsworth, Raciti and Carter (2021) call contested Aboriginalities, or the ways in which “Indigenous Australian identities are enmeshed in racializing discourses that often occlude diversity, hybridity, and intersectionality” (p. 112). Hollinsworth (1992) notes that discourses of Aboriginality within Australia have since constellated around ideas including ‘Aboriginality as descent’ (the idea that ‘authentic’ Aboriginal identity is linked to bloodline, underpinned by erroneous beliefs in the genetic inferiority of Aboriginal peoples); ‘Aboriginality as cultural continuity’ (the notion of a universalistic Aboriginal commonality deriving from shared cultural heritage, with the absence of perceived cultural practices or attributes leading to inaccurate claims of ‘lost culture’); and ‘Aboriginality as resistance’ (the emergent and ongoing performance and creation of Aboriginal identity through, among other dynamics, resistance to white authority, political struggle and collective solidarity). Whilst Aboriginality when used as a homogenising term is generally problematic, there also exists a long history of common Aboriginal identity serving as means of advancing solidarity and resistance – prior to invasion in 1788, such a collective concept was neither conceivable nor necessary. Aboriginality in this document is a broad identity marker that is used cautiously and derived from a resistance standpoint, that most commonly refers to the multiple and dynamic cultures that constitute First Nations peoples, recognising that individual and group identification practices vary.

Aboriginal
axiology,
ontology, and
epistemology

Axiology refers to values, ethics, protocols, and guidelines. Within the context of research as well as education with Aboriginal peoples, an appropriate axiological approach may include the proper incorporation of values and practices of reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, spirit, and integrity. Ontology refers to ways of being (as well as the nature of being) and epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge (as well as being entangled in power relations concerning whose knowledge counts). When applied to schooling, axiology, ontology, and epistemology raise questions concerning whose values and ethics, ways of being, and knowledges are valorised, included and practiced (Henry & Foley, 2018; Dudgeon et al, 2020). To raise questions pertaining to axiology, ontology, and epistemology in any given setting, is to question how power relations are operating and in whose favour they operate.

Capitalising
and
emphasising
key terms

White/'white' and Black/Blak are dynamic terms whose meanings evolve with time and context. White (capitalised) and 'white' are sometimes used to denote the paramount group in a race structured society to whom privileges flow owing to their structural location – 'white' and White, then, are racial categories. Inverted commas are applied to highlight the socially and politically constructed nature of the subject position 'white' which, distinct from skin colour, is a racial category that is particularised through entwinement with race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, location, and other social indicators – in other words, a person is not only raced but classed and gendered (etc.). These criteria account for the complexity of cultural identity. Social indicators such as race and class constitute identity *in relation to* others, and result in privileges being distributed unevenly to 'white' people. Given its historical constitution, 'white' is also often used to signify Australians of Anglo or more explicitly British heritage. When capitalised, White is sometimes used to separate institutionalised systems of power from personal, individual identity (i.e., a 'white' person working within a White system). Not dissimilarly, Black/Blak are used to indicate racial categories and are capitalised "in recognition of the historical racial injustices against Black people and as a way to 'right a historical wrong'" (Diversity Council, 2022, p. 9). Blak is often used in Australia to differentiate "Blak experience from the racialised experiences of non-Indigenous communities of colour" as well as to signal an "actively engaged, critical-political conscience" (Latimore, 2021, p. 19).

We use White and Black (capitalised) to denaturalise and challenge structural relations that reproduce a racialised status quo; for example, White education system or White curriculum are terms that illuminate racialised aspects of schooling that are typically normalised. We use 'white' to describe people of European ancestry who by virtue of origin are racially (albeit unevenly) privileged, whether this is recognised by 'white' individuals themselves. For readability, we do not use single quotation marks tirelessly throughout the text.

Country

Burgess, Thorpe, Egan and Harwood (2022) explain Country as "an Aboriginal English (as different from Standard Australian English) term that describes land as a living entity, the essence of Aboriginality and includes relational connection to people, culture, spirituality, history, environment, and ecologies of the non-

human world” (p. 160). Country describes the far-reaching relationality that lives within Country; “Country is agentic and encompasses everything from ants, memories, humans, fire, tides and research. Country sits at the heart of coming to know and understand relationality as it is the web that connects humans to a system of Lore/Law and knowledge that can never be human-centric” (Tynan, 2021, p. 597).

Decolonisation and Indigenisation are contested terms. Drawing from the work of Stein et al (2021), we recognise Indigenisation as a process of centring and normalising “Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts” (p. 6). This process works hand in glove with decolonisation as the complex act of questioning, deconstructing, destabilising, resisting, and refusing ongoing colonial structures that sustain racial hierarchy.

Race and racism(s) For a clean reading experience, we relinquish the habitual use of inverted commas though recognise ‘race’ as a social and political construction that is reproduced through everyday gestures, beliefs, and language opposed to biological fact. As a discursive production (i.e., repeated act of language as well as embodied performances or gestures), race is collectively reproduced through everyday interactions that bear material effects. Race functions as a technology for the management of human difference and is the cornerstone of a hierarchical political system that actively ‘produces’ differences (Lentin, 2020). As a dominant belief system, race was crucial to colonisation of the land that came to be known as Australia and justified discriminatory practices, including invasion; moreover, race remains fundamental to settler colonialism. Lentin (2020) says, the central ruse of race is that everything has a fixed or natural place, thus ‘race’ naturalises the very inequalities that it produces.

Racism denotes a dynamic set of practices and beliefs rooted in race thinking, which fundamentally reproduce racial hierarchy. Racism can be described as prejudice backed by power (Diversity Council Australia, 2022). Racism inheres in words, attitudes, systems, frameworks, norms and policies, with individuals and systems co-active in its re-creation. Racism can be overt or covert, it evolves with social contexts, and may include interpersonal, internalised, institutional or cultural expressions, including the dominant racial group’s everyday acceptance of a racialised status quo. An insidious form of contemporary Australian racism is ‘not racism’ (Lentin, 2020): the belief that racism does not exist or must be overt and intentional to be racist. ‘Not racism’ is often accompanied by sanitising statements – i.e., *it’s just a joke* – which function like gaslighting to deny or minimise racism, or to distance the speaker from association with racism. Discursive practices of ‘distancing, deflection and denial’ are fundamental to the reproduction of ‘not racism’ (Lentin, 2020). Another common contemporary expression is ‘reverse racism’: the idea that white people can be racially disenfranchised or are the victims of racial equity policies designed to support minority groups. While racial prejudice can be directed at white people, this is not racism because it is not backed by systemic power (Diversity Council, 2022, p. 23). Put simply, racism can be interpersonal and structural, overt and covert, intentional and unintentional. Racism is consistent and stable in its impulse to reproduce racial hierarchy, yet its

expressions can be highly changeable given that racism changes and is renewed with the social relations that produce it.

We use the term racism to denote these complex, dynamic, interpersonal as well as structural/systemic characteristics, and at times use *racisms* to recognise the myriad forms that racism can take. Other covert racisms covered in the review, which typically surface within schools, include colour or race blindness, deficit thinking, curricula exclusion, and white fragility.

Racism: Anti-racism and non-racism

The Diversity Council Australia (2022) delineates between anti-racism as active and socio-politically informed, and non-racism as passive. When adopting a non-racist standpoint, individuals or organisations may recognise that racism exists and is wrong but will relinquish or avoid responsibility for doing anything about it. Non-racism can also manifest in a well-meaning but limited ‘colour-blind’ perspective characterised by a benevolent impulse to ‘treat everyone the same’ (Schulz et al, 2023). Colour-blind standpoints fail to address the grounds of racial inequality and can advance assumptions of a pre-established cultural equality – i.e., the idea that we are all ‘structurally’ the same, that social life is racially neutral, or that we all begin from the same starting point in life. Denial of racial inequality is a problematic and insidious form of racism that can be experienced as ‘psychological gaslighting’ (Tobias & Joseph, 2020). Non-racism can inhere in beliefs that racism is limited to a ‘few bad apples’ (Ahmed, 2012), and is also typically expressed by individuals or organisations who deny the power they have to address racism. In contrast, anti-racist standpoints acknowledge racism in its multiple forms and are characterised by accountability and reflexivity: i.e., critical self-reflection on the roles that we as individuals, organisations and groups play in reproducing racism, even if unintentionally, as well as the power that we have to do something about it, even on a small scale.

Racial literacy

Deriving from the work of Guinier (2004), and Twine (2004), racial literacy is a set of discursive tools for identifying and talking about racism whilst developing collective drive for anti-racist action (Laughter et al, 2022). Scholars accentuate ‘literacy’ to mark a reading practice that can be learned (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006), which is honed by historical analyses of contemporary manifestations of racism (Oto et al, 2022), especially real-life examples that prioritise the perspectives of non-white people (Lentin, 2020). Racial literacy is context specific, thus, to be racially literate in Australia is to recognise that all forms of contemporary Australian racism remain rooted in colonisation and the denial of Indigenous sovereignty (Brown et al, 2021). Racial literacy is underpinned by an understanding of ‘literacy’ as a social practice that enables individuals and groups to negotiate life and live together, rather than viewing literacy as a purely decontextualised skill that is neutral, apolitical, individualistic, or competitive and amenable to ranking. Put simply, racial literacy is about learning to live together well within contexts of increasing social diversity – oftentimes, schools as convergence points for multiple communities, are society’s clearest expressions of ‘superdiversity’.

Self-determination	Conceptually and in practice, self-determination has many meanings. In Australia, discourses of self-determination have acted as a strategy of governance and attempt to reconcile black and white Australia. Like extermination, Christianisation and assimilation, self-determination has functioned as a strategy and attempt “to deal with the difference that Aboriginal people and their cultural practices present to the project of white Australian nationalism” (Wadham, 2013, p. 38). Conservative standpoints see self-determination in terms of what Aboriginal people need to do to become ‘self-determining’. Self-determination of a more reflexive kind contributes to a process of disintegrating the logic of colonialism by focussing on what the ‘white’ Self needs to do to support decolonisation. This standpoint refuses to see Indigenous self-determination as an Indigenous ‘problem’, goal or responsibility but acknowledges whiteness processes and the problems they generate for everyone.
Settler colonialism	In this review we use ‘colonisation’ to designate a <i>time period</i> when governing power over a group of people is originally asserted (i.e., from 1788). We use the terms ‘colonialism/coloniality’ to describe <i>racialised logics</i> of oppression, and ‘settler colonialism’ to denote <i>an enduring system</i> of social and material relations, policies and practices built on white, male, heteronormative supremacy, as well as an orientation to subjectivity grounded in ‘possessive individualism’ (Stein et al, 2020). Settler colonial societies like Australia are those in which the colonisers never leave.
Sovereignty	Under current international law, sovereignty is the power, authority and jurisdiction over a people and territory. Sovereignty can also be understood as a “discourse in which power relationships are conceptualized, theorized and activated according to historical legacies as well as current landscapes of power” (Nicol as cited in Bauder & Mueller, 2021, p. 2). In this sense, sovereignty is not fundamentally natural but a political construct. Inherent in Australia’s Westphalian use of sovereignty are Eurocentric property-owning connotations that position humans in relation to land as territory – norms that are reproduced through dominant discourses of Australian schooling and socio-political life. Australia as a nation-state claims sovereignty, as vested in the Crown in Parliament, and this is recognised internationally by other sovereign nation-states. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not cede power or relinquish sovereignty. Thus, Westphalian sovereignty functions as a tool of Indigenous dispossession and a treaty is required to negotiate a solution to ongoing Indigenous oppression. Sovereignty is therefore contested both practically and conceptually in Australia. In contrast to Westphalian sovereignty, “Indigenous sovereignty describes a more relational form of self-determination” (Bauder & Mueller, 2021, p. 2). It is not a purely “legal source of political authority, but rather a social and cultural way of defining community” (p. 10). In addition, Indigenous sovereignty is not a fixed concept but evolves in aspect to ongoing political struggles. Broadly speaking, Indigenous sovereignty is ontological and relational in that it does not vest power in a single entity or in people over land but recognises relationships between people and land including the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples to look after and fulfil their cultural obligations to Country. In terms of

the connections between sovereignty and education, both the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education (Morgan et al, 2006) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN General Assembly, 2007), place emphasis on the sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples to an appropriate, empowering, and equitable education. Although contested, there is thus a general sense that the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples can and should be realised *through* education including through school reform, but also in terms of "more far-reaching systemic change" (Bishop as cited in Vass & Hogarth, 2022, p. 11).

Whiteness

Whiteness transcends skin colour and refers to a hierarchical social system in which people are differentially positioned according to 'race' as a mode of classification – a system which (unevenly) privileges those marked 'white'. Conceptually, whiteness signals the cumulative effects of a race structured society in which the material and psychological benefits of race are channelled to 'white' people (albeit that privileges are experienced differently owing to the intersections between race, class, gender, and other social markers). For Lucashenko (2020), whiteness is a system of imposed normality; "it defines what's seen as normal" and in creating boundaries between ab/normal, constitutes the fundamental grounds of inequality in Australia which tend to be "invisible to white people" (p. 2), hence the importance of racial literacy.

Appendix B: Roundtable Questions

1. How do you define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education?
2. Thinking about the most important or influential examples from your own education (formal or informal) what has usefully shaped your orientation to Aboriginal Education – OR – you may highlight gaps in your awareness.
3. Complete this sentence: Talking about racism within the context of Catholic Education is...
4. Complete this sentence: My understanding of racism is ...
5. How do you understand your ethical responsibility to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
6. In what ways do you see CESA creating welcoming, inclusive and empowering spaces for First Nations Peoples, or where do you see opportunities for development?
7. How is CESA supporting teachers to teach for First Nations sovereignty?
8. Can you share some success stories of how CESA is nurturing relationships between First Nations communities, knowledges, and Countries/Country?
9. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategies adopt a 5-year range, others are mapped out over 10 years. Provide your thoughts on timeframe.
10. What questions would you like to see included in upcoming Yarning Circles (with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders) or Questionnaires (with CESA school/centre staff)?
11. Name one thing that made you think today.
12. OPTIONAL: The following are examples of criteria we might see on an Education Strategy of this kind: New Teacher Induction Programs; Comprehensive School Audits (i.e., to assess what schools are already doing); Supporting ongoing PD for all staff; Developing community hubs; Case studies of success stories. What is on your wish-list for CESA's Strategy?
13. OPTIONAL: How would you respond to the idea that strong commitments to First Nations perspectives diminish equally strong commitment to 'other' cultures within CESA schools?
14. OPTIONAL: Consider the possibility that some members of CESA school communities (i.e., parents/caregivers) are resistant or opposed to young people's education including initiatives like anti-racism agendas or terms like invasion. How would you respond?

In response to question 10 (key suggestions):

How does a white privileged male get to know and understand the realities of Aboriginal peoples?

Do you feel seen and heard?

How can engagement opportunities occur (without overtaxing local TOs or communities)?

What are the particular opportunities and challenges of schooling in your context?

What does racism look/feel like for you? How confident do school staff look/feel like to you in relation to racism?

Why did you choose a Catholic school?

How might the expression of community look different to the way it does?

What did/does your school do well and what can it do better?

Appendix C: Yarning Circle Questions

Main questions:

1. Why have you chosen Catholic Education?
2. What does your school do well to support Indigenous cultures, what could it do better?
3. Have you experienced racism at the school level? Can you tell us about it?
4. What must we as Aboriginal people take ownership of? What are we doing well?
5. What key messages do you want Catholic Education to hear?

Optional/additional questions (time permitting):

- How much does the school value your family and child/ren as part of the wider school community?
- What do you wish your teachers knew about your experiences of Aboriginal cultures and or education at the school/centre?
- What is the most important thing your school or centre can keep doing to support your family and child/ren?
- When there is a major news event related to racism, how do education staff talk about the issues with your children?
- How confident are you and your child/ren about the staff in your school to address difficult issues when it comes to racism?

Appendix D: Survey Questions

Online anonymous survey questions for staff in Catholic South Australian schools or centres:

- Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander: Yes / No
- If yes, with which language or nation group(s) do you belong?
- 1. Tell us about your role within Catholic Education – are you a teacher/leader/support worker? How long have you been in the role?
- 2. How do you understand and define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education?
- 3. Tell us about professional learning you have undertaken to support your work in Aboriginal Education. How do you feel about your capacities in this area?
- 4. If you are a teacher/educational support worker, how do First Nations knowledges inform your curriculum or pedagogy? If you are a leader, how do First Nations knowledges inform your leadership?
- 5. How (and how well) does your school/centre connect with local communities and Aboriginal knowledge systems?
- 6. What is your definition of racism, and how confident do you feel to advance racial equity through education?
- 7. How do you perceive the relationship between Catholic faith and Aboriginality?
- 8. What would you like to see in CESA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy?
- 9. Any other comments?

Online anonymous survey questions for parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander learners in a Catholic school or centre in South Australia:

- Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander: yes / no
- If yes, with which language or nation group(s) do you belong?
- 1. In your view, what is your school/centre doing well to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures?
- 2. How can they improve?
- 3. In terms of education/schooling, what is most important to you as a parent?
- 4. What does educational success mean for you?
- 5. Catholic Education of South Australia is committed to community consultation – what is the best way that they can connect with you in future?
- Any further comments?