

# Reflect, Respect and Respond when engaging with First Nations communities

**21 March 2024**

**Sara Richardson**

Hello, everybody! I'm Sara Richardson. I'm a National Be You Manager for Early Childhood Australia, and I'm based here on Kurna country. I'd really, really like to welcome you to this In Focus webinar, Reflect, Respect, and Respond when engaging with First Nations communities.

This Be You webinar is brought to you by the Be You delivery partners, Early Childhood Australia and headspace. And it's really important and it's significant, I think, that it's brought to you today, that we're having this today, on United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, or what we acknowledge in Australia as Harmony Day and also, National Close the Gap Day.

I'd really, I'd like to invite you afterwards to stay online to join our Q&A session with the panellists and also to learn more about how Be You operates, to listen to how, a conversation about the culturally responsive resources, as we go.

So, some information about Be You. You'll probably have come across Be You in finding this webinar. Be You aims to transform Australia's approach to supporting children and young people's mental health in early learning services, in primary schools, in outside school aged care, in secondary schools, and also in the tertiary sector; pre-service. And being part of the Be You community, means that your learning community, or your school, or your service can come along to events like this.

In addition, there's a whole suite of other tools and resources, but in particular we have a resource, of the Be You consultants, who can really assist you to implement Be You in your context and help you make changes that you want to change, to advance mental health in your community.

If you haven't already registered or aren't participating with Be You, not just for the webinar, but for Be You itself, then we'd love to have you join us. And you'll find the links in the chat or keep an eye out in the chat for how you can go about doing that.

I'd like to hand over to Juanita Wilson now to do an Acknowledgement of Country.

**Juanita Wilson**

Thanks, Sara, everyone. Hi and welcome. As is our way, I'd like to start by giving, learning a little bit, giving a bit of information about myself, and where I'm from. So my name is Juanita, and I'm a Palawa Pakana woman based on Luna Lutruwita, down in Hobart, Tasmania.

My grandmother's family were from Central Tasmania, known in language as Mumirimina, and then later labelled as the Big River Tribe. The area that my family come from originally consisted of five clans around 4-500 people prior to invasion and they moved along Timtumili Minanya, which is known as the Derwent River, to reach coastal camps, to gather food, to meet and perform cultural ceremonies.

So I now live in rural Tasmania, on the outskirts of Hobart overlooking Timtumili Minanya, and when I think about the significance of waterways for First Peoples of this country, First Nations Peoples use water from rivers for all their water needs; for drinking, for fishing, for washing. As well as the water, we spend time on rivers and billabongs, and they're central to First Nations

intergenerational knowledge and cultural transfer and for family time. So, rivers and waterways are also a place of Dadirri. So Dadirri is an Aboriginal word meaning deep inner listening, and a quiet, still awareness and waiting. I acknowledge that there are thousands of years of memories in these waterways and the waterways from the countries that you're meeting us from today as well.

As we meet and gather today sharing in yarns and cultural knowledge transfer, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge all the elders, past and present, from the many lands that we're meeting on. They cared for Country, cared for community and are our knowledge-holders and custodians. I extend this acknowledgement to all First Nations Peoples from across this landscape who might be meeting with us today. And I'd also like to acknowledge and thank the First Nations panel members for their expertise in development and design of the cultural resources we'll be discussing today, also for their generosity in sharing their knowledge and feel deeply honoured that we're all recipients of that knowledge transfer. I acknowledge that this land never was ceded.

Just passing back to you, Sara.

### **Sara Richardson**

Thank you so much, Juanita. And we will hear from Juanita later on as part, part of the panel. So let's just do a little bit of housekeeping. In particular, one of the things that we always want to also acknowledge is, when, in Be You, that taking care of our mental health and supporting our mental health is part of what we need to do. And so it's really important that we acknowledge that right now and make sure that this is a safe space for everybody to contribute and participate in.

Please only share what you're comfortable with sharing, either in our polls or in the chat. Just a reminder about confidentiality and making sure that what you're sharing is okay for you, but also for others as well. We'll post some helplines in the chat. So if you do need any support, please access and reach out for support in whatever way you need.

I'm going to start sharing the slideshow, too, because we haven't done that yet. So the helplines are also on the screen.

Also, just to help you get, get familiar with the space as well, there's some technical tips to help you maximise your learning. You can see, see there on-screen for selecting Speaker view which will give you a better experience. You won't, you'll be able to see the speakers in a better way. We will turn the screen off when there's not that many slides today, but when, when they are on, you might want to choose speaker view. The Zoom help centre will be the place for you to go if you need any IT assistance or support, and you can see that, links for that, in the chat.

You can also ask questions via a questions box, which is Q&A. And you can also share comments via the chat. So you can engage, and we would really encourage you to do that in, in whatever way is most appropriate for you. You might just be keen on listening and watching, which is fine as well.

We hope to respond to as many of your queries as we can - perhaps not during the session, but certainly more likely after and probably in subsequent opportunities with, when engaging with Be You as well. I'd like to also acknowledge right now the team who're working in the background: Nathan, Dino, Maria, Sophie, Ruth, Kathryn, Blaire and Robin from across ECA and headspace Be You teams.

Another note to you, too, that there's a downloadable resource that's been, I think it might have already been posted in the chat, that you can take with you to continue the conversation back in you, in your learning communities. And also let you know that the recording will be available post-webinar, and that this downloadable resource will be available as well.

So I, hopefully, that's enough for what you need. If you've got any questions, please sing out in the chat. There's a few of our team in the chat as well who will help you. So I'm going to stop sharing and I'm going to invite the panellists to come onto the screen. Today we're going to have some conversations, in particular, as Juanita mentioned, to talk to you a little bit about how the resources, the culturally responsive resources were developed, and also why. And then moving on to how you can use the culturally responsive resources in your practice, and also some strategies to support your practicing, engaging with First Nation communities and give you some examples of where this happened amazingly well. I think as you're doing this, be really mindful that the process that we went through as a panel to develop these resources could give you some clues about what might be a way forward in your community as well. So perhaps just keep that in mind. We are going to talk to you through the, you know, to have some conversations about the process, but you might be able to take away some of these ideas and thoughts as well as strategies, too.

So let's introduce the panellists. I'll start off with, I'd like to introduce Jess. Well, actually, they're going to introduce themselves. So Jess, over to you.

### **Jessica Staines**

I'm Jess Staines I'm a Wiradjuri woman. I'm based on Darkinjung Country on the New South Wales Central Coast. I, too, would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which I'm gathered on today and acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators that are joining this session. I'm the director of the Koori Curriculum, which is an Aboriginal early childhood consultancy, and we support educators to include cultural perspectives in their program and connect with communities. And I was a member of this awesome working group.

### **Sara Richardson**

Thanks, Jess, and again to Juanita to introduce. Tell us a bit more about where you're from, perhaps Juanita.

### **Juanita Wilson**

Yeah, of course. So you all will know, my name is Juanita, and my role actually at the moment currently is with Beyond Blue. So I'm the First Nations Inclusion and Equity Advisor with Beyond Blue.

Beyond Blue is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to reduce the impact and, of anxiety and depression, in Australia. So the work that I do supports the wider work that Beyond Blue does with a focus on First Nations communities, and with that lens of inclusion and equity.

This might be a good time to explain how, my previous role. So I actually jumped over the fence to my current role with Beyond Blue during the development of these resources. Prior to that, I was a Be You Consultant with ECA, so I was really blessed in that I was able to be involved in this project from beginning to the final product and to today, in both of those roles. So I'm really honoured to have had that opportunity. And it's a pleasure to be here today.

### **Sara Richardson**

Thanks Juanita, and I mentioned before that one of the really, really important resources, as part of the Be You initiative is, are the consultants, and I'd like to introduce Brian, who is one of those consultants. Or, yes, you are a Consultant kind of Brian, right?

### **Brian Morgan**

I have been a Consultant, yes. Now my role is the Be You Manager here in the Northern Territory, and so we work very closely with ECA, and of course with Beyond Blue as part of the wider Be You team to translate the wonderful resources available in this initiative into real and meaningful ways that will be of benefit to educators, school leaders and the wider school community.

I'd like to just add my voice quickly as well, to acknowledge the Larrakia people on Larrakia Country that I've called home for the last 16 years. I couldn't imagine a better place to be raising my family. It's a great privilege. And also just to acknowledge that as a non-Aboriginal man, I'd like to just openly acknowledge the tremendous privilege extended to me in joining today's panel, and it's just a pleasure to be here. Thank you.

### **Sara Richardson**

Great, thanks, Brian, and later on Brian's going to share some amazing examples of some strategies in action up where from, where he's from. So we've talked to you a little bit about who we are, so we'd like to do a poll now, and it's an opportunity for you to jump in and let us know what you hope to take away from today's session. So we'll launch the poll and while you're filling in the poll maybe I'll open the floor up to the panellists about what they think they might be taking away, or what you think people might be taking, be able to take away, from today.

### **Jessica Staines**

I think the main thing that hopefully the participants will take away from the session is the importance of protocols when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and some strategies and ideas of how they can better form meaningful relationships with their own local communities, either personally or professionally through their workplace. So that would be my hope, what people get out of today's session.

### **Sara Richardson**

That's great, Jess. And Juanita, have you got any thoughts?

### **Juanita Wilson**

Yeah, I agree with what Jess said. That, you know I hope people are able to take away some great ideas of, and perhaps strategies of, things that they can start to think about and implementing in their own setting. But you know, we always talk about reconciliation often being a process that starts within ourselves. So that process, it might just be a deeper, you know, reflection, to begin with, before bringing that out to our communities. So whatever that might be for people, I hope that it plants a seed of something and starts a conversation.

### **Sara Richardson**

It's interesting, isn't it? Cause, you know, this is a space where we can sometimes get stuck and not be, not know what to do next and doing something is, we're hoping that these resources will really support that process. Brian, do, have you got anything you'd like to add?

### **Brian Morgan**

Yes, certainly. Just in my role, working with headspace as the delivery partner for Be You, I'm hoping to bring a perspective, and my experience with 10 years as an educator in the classroom, for just the sheer value of a resource such as this one. And just the way it can be translated from wonderful ideas on a page into an educator's daily practice or how they'll approach their community consultations etc.

And then just, Sara, you mentioned a moment ago as well, we wonder about this space. In the introduction, "We know we should, but we don't know how," and well, that was where I found myself a good number of years ago, just looking to try and engage, and if I can just speak plainly, I would have loved to have this resource as an early career teacher. So better late than never. I hope I can bring some perspective to today's chat.

### **Sara Richardson**

Yeah, thank you. And one of the things I was thinking about - we'll have a look at the poll results in a minute - but maybe while that's launching, I'm really conscious we've got a we had a great response to the, to registrations, and so I'm sure there's a range of people here from leaders, wellbeing educators, educator leaders, teachers, people in all different roles across all different education settings. And I think you know, one of the things is everybody's got a role to play in this. And so what you might want to do is find: What's your role to play? How can you influence? And what is the piece that you can take away from? Because not everybody has the same role. And so, understanding what your role is and where it fits is probably is an important piece, too. But hopefully that you'll find something regardless of, of what your role is. So have we had a look at the poll results, Maria?

So, interesting. So, overwhelmingly, people are saying they want best-practice approaches for engaging with First Nations People. And I think yes, that's interesting. Because and that is one of the things we will talk about when we talk about engaging with the panel and why we went down that path. So we will look at that. What are some of the other two?

So that then the next two are examples of how. One of the caveats, I guess what I will say is, the cultural resources have only just launched and haven't been around for too long. So we, there may not be lots of examples yet, and at the same time, I'd also really like to say, if you have used them, or if you are engaging with them, and you've got stories to share, we would love to hear about them, because I think that it, you know, it's clear that 50% of people really want to know that, and we can't share them if you don't share them with us, or with each other. So, you know, I'd really would encourage you. And I think this is a tricky space, Jess, and it would. I'm going to specifically ask you this question. People sometimes can be anxious about sharing. They're like, "Oh, I'm not sure if we're quite doing it right, or we're not sure."

### **Jessica Staines**

Yes, well, that was the role that I was in when I was an early childhood educator, you know. So I started working in early childhood when I was 16, as the untrained child care assistant way back when before the 'Elf was on the Shelf', and so, knowing about your culture, and knowing how to translate that into an early learning context, I always say are two very separate things. And so, even for me, it was fumbling my way through to begin with, and just like Brian, I would have loved a resource like this, you know, to make it a lot clearer and straightforward. And what the right things are too. Because we all want to get it right.

But I think it's that idea, the theme for past reconciliation week was moving from safe to brave, and you have to be brave, and it's about being vulnerable, and you have to put yourself out there and just be humble and gracious, and open to feedback and critical reflection. But if we don't share examples of practice, we can't grow as a profession, and this is the one space that I think people are, I think they're really hesitant to share. But I really encourage people to share, because it's only through your stories that we can grow and we can see the multiple ways of doing this work. And what you are doing will be the inspiration for the person that's too scared to start. You know, we are all doing something, and it's so important to honour that and to lift the voices of our profession, of educators that are at the coalface, that are doing the work, and show those

examples of quality practice. So I always try, I'm the same as you, Sara, please share your work with us as much as you can, you know. Put it out there.

### **Sara Richardson**

And so, what we will do now is have a bit of a conversation, and I think this was kind of part of the conversation we started having as a panel, so to let people know there was, the resources were developed with a panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and Jess already mentioned that she was on the panel when Juanita was part of a working group that we had within the Be You team that worked together with the panel to develop the resources. And the process of the, engaging the panel, selecting who might have been on the panel, and then our conversations over time to develop the resources have been, were really interesting. But kind of also picking up on that point, Jess, you know, how do we create something? Or how do we develop something that supports Be You's aim to develop a mentally healthy community, but also speaks to an audience as wide as birth to 18 and pre-service, and in every space across Australia? So I don't know if you want, either of you or Juanita want to jump in. I know that's a question, probably without notice.

### **Jessica Staines**

I think that, yeah, you hit the nail on the head. That was, therein lies the challenge, is that you know, how are we going to find that common ground, not just within the professional space of early childhood, you know, primary and secondary, because there are nuances with, with each of those spaces, but also with the diversity of communities? So we had really great diversity on the panel, and I think, as you said, there's a lot that I think educators could learn when they're considering even things like setting up a reference group or a RAP working group as to what Be You did.

Because in my experience, I've never seen anything like it before, and I believe that Be You did it so well, is that there was great diversity amongst the panel members. So we had not just, you know, professionals, we had early childhood educators, primary school and secondary teachers. We had the team from Narragunnawali, but then also diversity in terms of cultural groups amongst the First Nations representatives that were kind of, part of, the working group, and we also were really mindful to make sure that there was that Torres Strait Islander perspective, because quite often the Torres Strait Islander perspective just gets lumped in to Aboriginal perspectives. And so it was a really interesting learning experience for me personally to understand some of the differences in protocols between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and make sure we were really honouring and doing that well. Making sure we had different genders represented, different ages and, you know, and even things like from urban context to a regional context.

So of course, there, and it just goes to show the diversity of what there is within First Nations communities. And that's why it's important when you're working with this protocols document to understand that this is a general guide, because not all communities that you'll find yourself working in will have a protocols document.

So the hope would be that you would then look at what has been pulled together, and when you are consulting with community, perhaps you can clarify some of those points for your specific context and make it transferred to wherever you are with the community that you're working in. But it was amazing, Juanita, how did you find it? I thought it was pretty cool.

### **Juanita Wilson**

Yeah, I loved the whole experience. And I love what you just shared, Jess. It was, it's absolutely I think, for this particular process around developing these resources. We're in the unique position where Be You is a national initiative. So we had to take that lens of being national, but then, as you say, having so many cultural groups, and even more in terms of language groups across Australia,

we had to sort of, the panellists I can imagine had to think about, how do we make this something that everybody could see themselves in, or something that they could add to in their community? And just you know, be that foundation, that starting point for them, and give them those ideas to begin that deep reflection and deep learning.

So that was a challenge. And I can certainly, you know, within communities themselves there might be things like there might be more than one cultural group that needs to be involved. If people are looking at doing a RAP or an advisory group like you say, there might be a number of language groups, you know. You might need to involve elders in that process or have a think about if First Nations People in your community have a spokesperson that needs to be included in those conversations. So it's sort of, I guess I can see the way we've been about things was very similar to what educators are probably thinking about now.

But one of the things that really stands out to me is that the process in itself is really important as well. So really, you know, checking, you know, are you sharing that position of empowerment with First Nations People? Are you acknowledging the First Nations People in that space as the subject matter experts and remunerating them as such? And I think, if we talk about co-design, but I really think it's more or less about providing a basic structure and then getting out of the way and that's where the real magic can happen. You know, it's elevating First Nations voices, and their wants, needs and desires. And I think what I'm really proud of with this project is that it's absolutely something that comes from First Nations Peoples' hearts. And, as I said earlier in the Acknowledgement, it was such a generous sharing of that knowledge that other, everyone can take away and think about and contemplate, and hopefully take some next steps.

### **Sara Richardson**

It was interesting cause, wasn't it? Cause one of the thing one of the things we did was make sure we allowed plenty of time. And I think sometimes we get trapped into the, I need to, we need to get it done quickly, and we need to move through the process really quickly but we also had timelines, and we also had deadlines and we actually didn't meet that many times.

So the structure was important and the time in between. So we would come together, have a conversation, and it was mostly done online. But those facilitated conversations really helped us shape and ask the questions: Is this working? Is this what we want? Are we sure? Those kind of things to help us get to where we go. So I think that the other kind of things that learning communities and educators can take away with, if they want to embark on meaningful engagement, you need to make sure there's an, the right amount of time, and then, if you use these protocols to help you engage with the right people.

### **Jessica Staines**

I think, Dwayne, it was the facilitator, and he did an amazing job. And that's something that we've all reflected on. And I believe that Be You also got consultation before starting this, about what that process should look like. And one of the things that was really clear from the beginning was, how did we want to manage things like conflict if that would arise? Because there is such diversity, so what if we all didn't agree? And how would we determine the best way forward? And we spent a lot of time at the beginning of each of those sessions before jumping into the agenda of what we had to cover work-wise. It was almost in a 50-50 split of just checking in with each other as humans first, because when this was being developed, it was in the lead up to the referendum, and that affected all the panel members and working group people in some capacity in different, you know, at different times and stages, you know, both personally and professionally. So checking in with each other.

And I think that's really important when you're also reaching out to community, to think about that you're checking in with community and members of your community as people first before you're asking something of them and from them. But also, whilst there was that process and that structure, and we had that clear in our head, what we were working towards to achieve, there was also room for a bit of fluidity to meet people's needs and not lose touch with the humanity of each other, because sometimes that can happen in this online world. So there was that real deep connection and care as we all got to know each other in this working group space. That was something that I think that really stood out to me was the care, I suppose, that needed to take place.

### **Sara Richardson**

And I was thinking to kind of responding back to what you were saying before Juanita, how we landed on. And we talk about the culturally responsive resources. It isn't just one thing. There's the protocols document which is really powerful. But sitting alongside of that is kind of a couple of additional resources that support that which are actually fundamental before you engage with the protocols document. And the first advice, and we kept coming back to this in almost in every session: you need to actually think about who you are and how you're showing up in the space first. And so that linked to the AITSL Intercultural, I'm going to get the name wrong, someone pop it in the chat that would be great, you know. Actually, you need to do a bit of work on that bit first, before you start jumping into the next bit, and the other resources are, it's built on from the one of the Narragunnawali's stakeholder resource development. Who are the people I need to be talking to? How do I find them? How do I know how to engage with them? And so doing those two pieces of work before you jump into the protocols document is actually how the resources are situated on the website, and how the panel would envisage them being worked on. And we kept coming back to those, particularly those prefacing pieces first, before the protocols document almost every time.

Jess, do you want to comment on that at all?

### **Jessica Staines**

Yes, the self-reflection tool is really important. And the stakeholders list that, that's being offered on the Be You website as well.

I think it's about when you're looking at community engagement, we have to start with the why first, before we worry about the who and the what. So why are you wanting to connect with community? And then by working through that stakeholders list and developing that stakeholders list with members of your community, so you're able to identify who is who and the different roles in which we all play. So there's a difference between Aboriginal early childhood consultants, your local Aboriginal Lands Council, your language custodians, traditional owners and elders and cultural performers and storytellers.

You know, like we all in some ways we may overlap, and we're all connected, and know each other, and so forth. But we all have very unique individual roles. And so it's important when you're reaching out to community that you've done a little bit of that groundwork. So you're making sure you're asking the right questions of the right people. And when you're then encountering conflicting advice, you're also better able to determine how that person is placed to be giving that advice. So understanding your community and the layout of it is important. So those tools will help you do a bit of that mapping work.

### **Sara Richardson**

Juanita, did you want to add anything to that?

### **Juanita Wilson**

Yes, I was just, I totally agree with you, Jess. And I was also just thinking about the importance of developing relationships and fostering trust as well. And I think, you, you mentioned the amazing Dwayne, who was our facilitator in the panel group, and I think Dwayne is a shining example of how a facilitator role is really important in terms of really spending time allowing group members to get to know each other. And, as you mentioned before, Sara, that can take time, and I think one of the things that I noticed throughout the process was that, you know, those, each time we all met or gathered we need, there were times during those spaces where we needed to stop and pause and reflect, and maybe just have a yarn about something that didn't even relate to what we were there to do. And that just forms that foundation of, you know, trust, relationships that are really key in these spaces. And I think you know, Nathaniel Tamwoy as one of the panellists, has a really great piece early on in the cultural protocols document that talks about relationships in school settings, and if I can share a little bit of it now, he, I'll quote a piece that he wrote, was that, "Words like love, trust, and relationships can be feared in the education sector. But for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nothing good happens without them." And I think that's really key to that understanding that before we get to the what, we actually need to be thinking about that forming those relationships and not expecting things to happen overnight. And, in fact, sometimes that can be really uncomfortable is sitting in the unknown, not knowing what this is going to look like at the end, and I think that was a big part of my experience in this as well, is that we had the foundation. We had a bit of, all of us, I'm sure, had a different idea about what it would look like at the end.

But really, just sitting in those uncomfortable spaces can actually be a blessing sometimes because you're able to give the project the time and space it needed to breathe and form those relationships so that the end product, whatever that might be something that the community can really see themselves in and really see as something that's going to benefit them more and improve social, emotional wellbeing outcomes for First Nations Peoples, as well as their wider community. So I think for me, relationships are really key and important, and that's something that really rang true through the whole process.

### **Sara Richardson**

And just before we move to Brian, because Brian's got some fantastic examples of how this can show up and what it can look like in the school, not necessarily from the culturally responsive resources, but with some places where protocols are really deeply embedded, and they can be reflected in what it can look like. One of the, I guess one of the things I was thinking about as you were both talking, because I was part of the working group. So the Be You team, working together with Beyond Blue and headspace colleagues, to kind of support the work. One of the things we often would do before we, but in between panel sessions was really go back and make you know, check how we were showing up in the panel space and making sure that we were really doing that reflection about ourselves and being clear about what we expected. Cause, that's really important, too, and knowing how to kind of be in a relationship with the panel, and really listen in a way that the panel members were absolutely heard, and it was a true design process. But we spent time thinking about that and talking about that ourselves as well, so that, you know, that was part of the process. So again, allowing time, but creating a structure for some of those things to happen.

### **Juanita Wilson**

Yes, I'll just jump in there and add something. I think one thing that stands out for me that adds to that is, you know, Narragunnawali talk about that process of unlearning, relearning, learning,

unlearning, and relearning, and I think sometimes it's really uncomfortable when we come into these spaces, we think we have a certain level of knowledge. But when we have the conversations sometimes that are a little bit difficult, whether through our systems, you know, what's been taught in schools,

If you're my age, 20 years ago the curriculum looked very different to what it does now, and sometimes we just need to check our, what we're carrying with us as our unconscious bias, and what like you say, Sara, I think that's really key if there's a working group that's helping with that foundation. Just being mindful that sometimes you might not know there's pieces there that are uncomfortable, and you might need to unlearn and then go, come at things with a new creative lens, and be prepared, you know, to perhaps leave your Western mindset at the door. There might be a new way of doing things that you hadn't considered before that can be more inclusive and equitable for First Nations Peoples as well. And so they can be invited to the table. I think that's really important.

**Sara Richardson**

Absolutely. Right, so Brian, we'd really love you to share some examples highlighting the use of resources in practice. And so I'm going to share my.

**Brian Morgan**

Yeah, I'm happy to, if you want to hold off just for one moment Sara.

**Sara Richardson**

Sure. Yes.

**Brian Morgan**

I'll just, I'll just add to what's already been said, and in particular, what Juanita just mentioned as well: the connection before curriculum reflection by Nathaniel. This wasn't planned, by the way, but I did actually highlight the exact same section during my own reading of it as well, talking about the importance of connecting with people before you seek to engage with them as well, and to show that generosity of spirit and genuine reciprocity, because things will only progress at that speed of trust as well.

And speaking of the Western mindset, really, anyone who's listening to me now can tell that I did not grow up in Australia. I arrived over here as an adult, so I really only started developing my own opinions and perceptions of First Nations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Peoples as an adult.

So we talk about continuums in this space quite a bit. I really did join at the very beginning of that continuum. And I say that because I'm speaking to a lot of people in this webinar today, and some people will already be doing great work in this space. Some people are very much at the outset of their journey, and they're wondering where do I begin?

And again, just to speak to the value of this resource, there's information all throughout that will help people on every stage of their journey towards genuine cultural responsiveness.

I had to learn at the very beginning, concepts I've got my notes here, and simple things like family structures. I came over here with my preconceptions of a nuclear family. I was wholly unaware of kinship structures and that shared care and shared family responsibilities model. I needed to know that and I needed to be told.

The real sort of personal, intergenerational experiences of Australia's recent history as well. I might have known some historical facts, but I certainly didn't know the depth and the experience of that which came. And that's, I'm still developing that as well. I'm sort of midway along my Dunning-Kruger curve on that one being perfectly honest. And also just acknowledging that when we're working as educators, there's often a perception of schools as not always being the most wholesome and holistic places for all cultures, ages, and stages. So even though we will hopefully enter into that space in a very positive and proactive space as well, we need to just acknowledge our own position and our position in an authority, in an institution that might not always have been used for the best of all Australian citizens.

So with that in mind, Sara, I'd love if you'd start sharing some of these resources, and I started by just acknowledging the fact that I've been living in the NT for such a long time, and it's a true privilege, because Aboriginal cultures, perspectives, just daily interactions are the way of life up here. So it's always at the fore of everyone's experience.

But I just wanted to share some truly remarkable examples of this genuine cultural engagement with some schools.

I'll start by just speaking of Gunbalanya school.

Oh, I'm sorry, I will just also begin by saying, these resources have been shared with full, free, prior and informed consent, and my extreme generosity and gratitude to the schools for sharing them in this format as well.

So Gunbalanya School and the Bininj People, they have used the woven mat on the screen in front of you and the Marebu story to represent the both ways learning that takes place in their community in Arnhem Land. The weaving represents the combination of balanda, which is Western or non-Aboriginal people, and the Bininj ways of knowledge as well.

It's just really such a beautiful metaphor as it just brings together the fact that a child is educated and learns through so many different ways. And this is a lovely metaphor for the fact that they can learn the Western as well as the local ways, knowledge and just how to exist.

So next stage or next slide, please, Sara, thank you.

That's a beautiful metaphor that the local students can see themselves in. But as educators, we all have just this passionate love for planning. I know I certainly did, and the school has put the work in for a very long period of time. They've been engaged in this and both ways consultation process for many, many years.

And I'm showing this just as an example of what is possible when you have those flexible timelines and you give the opportunity for genuine engagement.

Anyone who's familiar with the work of John Hattie will know that high expectations are one of the best effect changes you can have.

So if you're looking at this resource now and think, I wouldn't know where to start with that. Don't worry, you start with the first step that's in front of you, and you can work towards something as this.

On the left you have the local Bininj curriculum with the use of local languages, kinship structures, ceremony, their laws and customs, and on the right we have the ACARA curriculum, which is important for any young person's education as well. Students understand they're learning both of these ways. They're code-switching a lot of the time, and to help them do both of them effect, excuse me, effectively, they've also developed a wellbeing curriculum at Gunbalanya School as

well, to help those students to regulate their emotions, to see themselves as part of their community and how to work.

It's just a fantastic example, and I could talk about it for a long time, but being mindful of time, Sara, next slide, please.

Oh, sorry just speaking about that, speaking of two ways and both ways curriculum on the previous page. Go to page 17 of the Protocols documents. You'll find instructions on where to start there.

If you're, excuse me, the graphic in front of us here speaks about the Wellbeing Hub which was using the school as the auspices, as it says in the document of Gunbalanya School, to reach out to the wider community as well, where they've helped to identify who their partners in community are, how can they develop a shared understanding? How can they bring a trauma-informed lens to all different adults and services working in the region as well?

This did not happen overnight, as I'm sure you're aware, and it just shows what is possible when you stick to the process and engage in that genuine two-way dialogue. And like I say, if you'd like to know where to start in a process such as this, have a look at page 8 in the document that we're referencing here today.

Those are some big picture resources. I'll bring it back down now to educators. And by educators I mean any adult working in a school. I'm not looking at the hierarchy of teachers, assistant teachers... all adults working in a school. If you're wondering how you can bring these perspectives into your daily practice, I've got two examples coming up on the next couple of slides.

The first one, again, is from Gunbalanya and this might look very familiar to a number of our educators attending here today. They have taken the zones of regulation and they have adapted it in a very sensitive way, to show that there are faces that are more representative of the students who can see themselves in the document.

They've worked with the various clans and language groups in their area to translate that emotional language into language so people can read it. And again, they can see themselves in the document. And if I can direct your attention to the bottom of the document there as well, you can see that they have used a variety of elements and totem animals and just elements from the, from the local culture that's important to them to again represent the rather Western model of blue zone, green zone, yellow zone.

So again, it's a well-known resource that has been sensitively adapted in full consultation. So, people – and by people, I mean adults and young people at the school and in the community – can see themselves reflected in it.

So those documents and resources are from Gunbalanya, and the Bininj People in particular, and my eternal gratitude for sharing that in today's forum.

The next document comes from a different school. It comes from Laynhapuy Homeland Schools, also in East Arnhem.

Now they are based on Yolngu country. They're mostly based around the town of Yirrkala, but also extending it to a number of camps as well.

This resource was shared recently. And they've combined the Zones of Reg that you might recognise, also the Berry Street Ready to Learn Scale, and they've gone a step further again, and they've included the genuine faces of young people in their community, which has an artistic filter

put over it, and for reasons of confidentiality and appropriateness, we blurred the faces for this presentation today.

Now the Yolngu People have a lot of understanding of water because it's such an important element just in their daily lives going back millennia. So they have many, many words for different types of water. And they've used the metaphor of different types of water to represent different emotional states, which means something genuine to their local people. And they can helpfully, and they can use this in a helpful way where their young people come to class and they can identify themselves by means of the young person in the canoe. Which sort of water are they on? Are they on cool, calm water, like a glassy sea, for example, where they're calm and they're ready to learn? Or are they, are they on the sea after a storm, where it's obviously quite choppy, and you can see, angry or frustrated.

There is the, in the bottom right, there's the, I think, I'm not sure which colour it is now, excuse me, it's escaped me, but it's the sort of the silly stage, you know, where you're feeling a little bit anxious, and I've talked about water in a stream. So it's moving, it's energised, but it's not confrontational or a drama. It's just that silly stage. And you can see all the various words of language in there which is a different Yolngu Matha word for a different type of water.

And then in the bottom left we have the resources, excuse me, resources, or the ways of explaining where we might be in the blue zone; a little bit sad. And then the school is going to use this to work with their students to help identify their emotions. So we can put strategies in place so they can arrive, be seen in class and then get themselves ready to learn. Obviously translated into language.

And I will also mention that, this document here it looks, it's a gorgeous document. It looks reasonably straightforward. But even though Laynhapuy are working very much in full consultation with their community, and they're embedded, this document still took three years to develop because of the different consultation process that's involved, the translations, etc. There's such a body of work involved behind this as well.

So I'm sure you'll agree, it's a wonderful resource. These are examples of what's possible when you stay the course, when you enter in that genuine sense of humble curiosity, I would suppose. We know our place, and you're more than happy to listen as well as to contribute.

So just lovely to get to showcase some of the wonderful work happening up here in the Northern Territory. And again, my thanks to Gunbalanya School and Laynhapuy Homeland schools for opportunity to share today.

### **Sara Richardson**

Thank you, Brian. Thank you so much. And I think it is amazing to see what is possible. And I think, and again, also acknowledge the work that's done there, and obviously deeply rooted or deeply grounded in the context and the relevance of that community. And I think that's one of the things that we would, we were talking about when we were thinking about sharing these. Jess, do you want to comment on what?

### **Jessica Staines**

Yes, look, I like, I was blown away when Brian first shared the stories with me, and I think it's so beautiful to see those examples, and I know one of the things that we've yarned about when, when sharing stories like this is the importance of not have, not trying to create a cookie cutter approach. So you can't pick something out from one community and just put it into yours, because, as Brian has explained, there's a whole body of work and consultation, and the process

that was followed through there. But what we can do, is we can treat it as a provocation, and we can reflect: How does this relate to the world of your children and your students? And what are some ways that you can respond without creating copies of, of that work? So that's how I would see it. I would say it as a, as an invitation to, to really prompt some further reflection for you to create something with you, with your community that sits with your context. But yes, it's so inspiring to be able to see that, Brian.

### **Sara Richardson**

Yes. And I was thinking, you know, that whole notion of process over product is actually where the work is done. We end up with this. And we're, you know, so lucky to be able to see the end product if you like. What we have, what we don't see here, and you've tried to really articulate that, Brian, is the process that those communities would have gone through together, which is kind of what we were talking before about the panel, like we were trying to describe a little bit about the process because if you can get that process really working and spend time and invest in it, you will end up with something that's really meaningful and authentic and right for your context.

So you know, I think you're right, Jess, using them as a provocation about what's possible, what you could strive for. But it might look really different, because if you're in an urban community, and perhaps have a range of people who might not be as connected to their culture as, in the same way that these people are, you are, you won't, those things won't make sense in the same way.

### **Jessica Staines**

And I guess that's one of the things that we were going to yarn about next anyway Sara, is that idea of like, how do we start making connections with our, with our own communities? And what are some ways that we can do that? And so where I live, and in the majority of places where I've taught as a teacher, has been in quite different contexts to where these examples were showing that Brian's just offered.

But I do want to sort of chat through a little bit, pages 8 and 9, which Brian also referenced, because I think that's sort of the foundation of this session really of, you know, and some things that we've talked about and around so hopefully, you can see that. So once you've, sort of, looked at creating your stakeholders list, so you've thought about your why, so why you wanting to connect? Is it because you're wanting to learn about the local language? Is it that you're wanting to support Aboriginal families that are attending your service? Is it because you want to create a bush tucker garden? Or, I don't know, like you want to look at ways to teach respectfully about the Stolen Generations? All of those things, they require a different person, and a different, and a different role that person will play. So if you're wanting to know about your language, then a language custodian from your area is what you need. If you're looking to support Aboriginal families, potentially you may need to reach out to local elders. But what are the organisations and businesses that also exist within your, in your communities? So like ..., for example, is one of those organisations that I do a little bit of work with. And so where do they fit within?

So this is the importance of doing that mapping. And as a starting point, if you don't know who is who and you're just at that, that very, very beginning, I always say the best way to make connections is in person and not over phone or email. So using those key dates and significant periods throughout the year, like Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, when you know that community are coming together or desert mob markets up, you know, NT way, you know, where community are all coming together to celebrate and to be as one, and to go and attend that, and to wear your work uniform if you have one. So you're visually present, because showing up time and time again, mob are able to sort of see, "Oh yes, like, I've seen them around here before," you know, because you're not just talking to the talk, you're actually physically showing up. So I feel like, you

know, having that is important too and collecting that information, just doing a little bit of mapping and having a yarn in person.

And when you're making those initial connections, making sure as well that you're not bombarding and asking a whole heap of questions and putting the responsibility on community to be educating you, particularly with things that are sensitive. And obviously we know that educators are only asking those questions because they're genuine and they're enthusiastic and they're really wanting to learn. But we need to take some of that personal responsibility for ourselves in doing that education work. And if we're wanting to know some things about, that, that can be taxing.

So even information about the referendum, because that's still very fresh and very raw for a lot of us, that you do that with someone, you, you engage in consultation professionally, because there is an emotional tax that those conversations have on, on community. And that, that same burden of education can't fall to the Aboriginal educators that you have working at your service, particularly if there's only one, you know, First Nations educator that's on your team, or the Indigenous families that you have attending your school or early learning service. So some of them just want to be, you know, families. They don't want to be there having to educate and having to have these conversations all the time. So being mindful of the forum in which you're asking this, and is it appropriate?

So having realistic expectations as well about how long it can take. So even though you've now worked out, who is who in the community, and who the correct person is for you to be reaching out to, as we sort of said, there's two parts of that: you know, understanding that people are humans and service providers are humans – they're people – and that they have lives and things that are happening in communities and their families, and they may not always be in the space that they're able to service you, and they may not always respond because they have things that are happening in community, and our obligation and time and devotion is always with family and community first.

And secondly, there is that inherent mistrust that a lot of our community have towards mainstream institutions like schools and early learning services, and so it can just take time for the community to feel comfortable, to come and to be with you. So asking if they would like to bring a support person, asking if they need help with transport, asking if they would like you to come to them. So I would never ask an elder to come to me, you know. That's not how it's done like if we want to see our elders, we go to them. So there's just a few things, I guess, to think about.

Some of the other things that we've suggested is when you're inviting somebody to come and visit you, or to provide a service, that you're not asking them on the spot and expecting them to give you an answer straight away. But you give that space and also understanding, I guess, in questions in general. I know I'm talking about a lot of different things very quickly, because I know that it's actually complex. There's a lot to actually think about and I'm just, I have a habit of trying to beat an elephant into a jam jar, but I'm hoping that some of this is landing with you.

For a lot of our working group members and panellists, they sort of express this idea that in a lot of our communities, questioning is not something that we do. So when we want to understand something culturally we don't ask questions. That information is shared with us at a time that our community and elders feel that we are okay to be receiving that information. So it happens in time. And even when there were points that were being discussed in, in our group, often we would say, "Actually, I don't know the answer to that, I might feel this way, but I actually need to check in with my community to make sure that I'm actually representing their values and perspectives accurately." And that's something that I'm really aware of, is that what my role is, what my lane is, what I feel that I'm confident to speak on, and where I need to step away and say, "Well, actually, I

need to check in with somebody else.” So there, there is understanding the protocols that we have and our responsibilities that we have as First Nations Peoples working in this space. And why we can't always service you in the way that you may expect that we should, you know. So Black Business happens differently, if you can sort of understand that a little bit.

Developing those relationships before you actually need something is important. So things aren't transactional and that you, you build that relationship and that rapport first.

Often educators that I meet, I meet them in a professional space. So they've engaged me to come and deliver some professional development. But I can share with you; I delivered some PD to this service years and years ago, but they've kept in touch, you know, they're on Facebook, they give me a thumbs up, they encourage me. Occasionally they'll send me messages, and they'll share with me what they've been up to at their centre, some projects that have taken place. And recently they made this beautiful Acknowledgement of Country book, and they made an Acknowledgement of Country song. So this is all just children's drawings of caring for Country and because an Acknowledgement of Country is not just something that we say, it's something that we do. And so how are they practicing custodianship and stewardship? So they sent me this beautiful book with their reflections and their drawings in the mail and, as well as this beautiful canvas piece of art.

And nowhere in any of this had they asked anything of me but I really feel like they genuinely care and they're investing in that relationship. I know that some other schools and services I work with, they're doing things in the lead up to Easter, like they're, they're sending Easter treats and cards that the children have made to members of the community that they've formed a relationship with, just to let them know they're thinking of them. When they harvest Warrigal Greens from their garden, which are abundant where I am at the moment, this time of year, and they make Warrigal Greens pesto, they jar them up and they drop them off at community members' houses, and so forth, just to, to continue that connection, that it's not just that one off, and without an expectation of receiving something in return. So those are a few things that I know have, have worked for me, and I know I'm taking up all the air space but, Juanita, am I missing things? Do you want to jump in?

**Juanita Wilson:**

I'm really enjoying what you're sharing, Jess.

**Brian Morgan**

Me too.

**Juanita Wilson:**

It's right on the money.

**Sara Richardson**

Just before you jump in, Juanita. We, we've got only a few minutes left, so would you like to give us your last minute thoughts, and we will throw back to you Jess to have one more say, but we'll wrap up, and then, so yes over to you, Juanita.

**Juanita Wilson**

Yeah, probably just quickly. You know, just going back to that concept of the principles of two-way learning, I think, which some of what Jess has also talked about there in that cultural space. But, you know, I think when we really engage in a two-way learning process, there's so many strengths that can be garnered from that. You know, where, where First Nations, children, educators, and young people and families can bring and see themselves in your service and see that their culture

is something that's celebrated. I think that's a really beautiful thing. So I would say to educators, and individuals even as well if you're not affiliated with an early learning service, there could be some individuals that are interested in learning today from a completely different walk of life and completely different background, and working background. I would say, maybe just read it through the document through in parts even just one page at a time. Have a yarn about what it might mean for you in your community with someone you trust and maybe explore those case studies, and how they might relate to you and your setting, and how they might look similar or be different. So that's a really great starting point as well.

**Sara Richardson**

Thanks, Juanita. Hey, have you got 30 seconds Brian?

**Brian Morgan**

I absolutely do. Just as Jess was speaking, I was positioning myself at the beginning of my journey, and everything she was saying would have been new information to me. I'm hearing her speak now, and I'm going, "Yes, of course, of course," but it just speaks to that range of experiences and people not knowing what they don't know.

As a teacher, I've seen some comments asking, can we have the resources? And just to double down on that again. It's not appropriate I don't think, to take a resource such as that which is so place-based and so intrinsic to one community and drop it in somewhere else. The process is far more important, I would agree with everyone else here, than the final product.

And yeah, I think that expression of, Nothing about us without us is great. If I was to take a resource and drop it in, and say, "Here we go, that's for you," that would be well-intentioned, but I think a bit disrespectful. So engaging in that discourse is, is absolutely key.

**Sara Richardson**

You want 30 more seconds, Jess?

**Jessica Staines**

Just to say, thank you for Be You and ECA for honouring and privileging First Nations perspectives in the work that you do, and creating this opportunity for us and for professionals, so that we can all do this work with integrity and respect, and that I think that's what we all want, you know, we want to make sure that we're doing it respectfully. So I just thank you for giving me the opportunity to be involved.

**Sara Richardson**

You're very welcome, and I want to thank everybody, all of the panellists, and particularly Jess and Juanita, for coming. And thank you, Brian, for sharing and thank those schools that shared with you.

And I also want to thank all the, everybody, for joining. And if you're watching the recording, we really know that you care about this and this is something that matters a lot to you. That's why you're here. So keep using the resources. Keep talking to each other, and, like we said at the beginning, keep sharing.

Thank you so much for your time today and we look forward to continuing a conversation with you beyond today, but also perhaps in the Q&A afterwards.

So I'll say goodbye and thank you all for coming and finish the webinar and look forward to seeing you in the Q&A. So if you'd like to move into the Q&A now, we will turn our cameras off, and we'll go and have a wriggle if you like, but we'll jump straight into the Q&A.