

## Acknowledging Country

*'Country is everything. It's family, it's life, it's connection'. — Jude Barlow, Ngunnawal Elder*

Country is the term often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity.

(from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country#toc-what-is-country->)

Acknowledging Country is one way of showing your respect for the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and sky where you live. Acknowledgements of Country can be active and creative; make it meaningful and sincere. If you do not already know, find out who the Traditional Custodians are of the Country you are on.

## Cultural Safety in the Classroom

*"An environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together."*

— Williams, R. (1999). Cultural safety – what does it mean for our work practice?  
Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 23(2), 213-214.

As educators, it is important to ensure that you are creating culturally safer spaces for your students. Cultural safety is largely about examining your own cultural identities and attitudes, and being open-minded and flexible in our attitudes towards people from cultures other than our own.

*"Recognise and understand your culture:  
If you are not white, culture will probably be an easy concept for you to understand. But for white Australians, this can be more elusive. As whiteness is normalised and made neutral, white people do not often understand that they have culture."*

— Genevieve Grieves, First Peoples First, The Relationship is the Project, pp.19, 2020

Cultural safety requires actions that respect, recognise and support that specificity of the cultural identity of a person to appropriately and safely meet their rights, needs and expectations. To do this you must work from the perspective of the community, not from an individual viewpoint. The outcome of cultural safety is defined by the receiver of the service/event/etc, not by the providers.

By establishing culturally safer spaces, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, students, children and communities are supported and empowered in their participation and collaboration.

**Teachers and educators can promote culturally safer spaces by;**

- Introducing yourself from a cultural perspective. Sharing the significant stories, places, people and cultures that make up your cultural self.
- Creating the space for learners to reflect, respond and share their own culture and perspectives, only if they wish to do so.
- Modelling respectful, open and value free communication and attitudes.
- Never asking learners to focus on the cultural dimensions of any culture other than their own.
- Asking learners how they would like to be addressed.
- Never expecting any individual, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to speak as a representative of their culture.
- Responding promptly and challenging any behavior or perspectives that could be considered prejudice, biased or discriminatory.
- Creating opportunities for the group to share what cultural safety means to them. Making space for them to mediate their own boundaries and expectations of what is acceptable and what isn't.
- Recognising and avoiding generalisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures; there are over 250 sovereign First Nations and there are many experiences and expressions of Indigeneity.
- Being aware and critical of the language you use when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.
- Modelling to your students that it's okay not to know the answer to everything. If you don't know the answer to a question – say you don't know. Accepting this ensures that broad generalisations are not made.
- Recognising that your understanding of cultural safety is not the same as others. Although offence may not be intentional, it doesn't diminish the experience of others. Model accountability in your classroom with honesty, learning and committing to making changes.

## APPROPRIATION

Direct copying of artwork by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists is disrespectful and an act of plagiarism. An artist's intentions and concepts are trivialised and disappear when artworks, techniques or materials are simply copied. Artworks are the intellectual and cultural property of the artist and sometimes their communities. No artist's work should ever be copied.

It is important for teachers and educators to carefully consider better approaches to engaging with artists and their artworks. One way is to discuss the concepts and approaches of an artwork or art practice and create ways for learners to connect with those through their own experiences. Learners then gain agency in developing their own visual and material languages to express themselves and their own stories.

## Words and Language

It is really important to think critically about the language that we use in our classrooms. The origins of language and words and how their meanings can have impact. Rethink terms that have anthropological roots like 'artifact', 'dreaming' 'tribe' instead use words that respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as continuous living cultures. Like 'Cultural object, cultural practice instead of 'tradition' or 'creation story' instead of 'dreamtime' and 'nation' instead of 'tribe'. Also use language words when they are available.

Refer to artists in the ways they refer to themselves rather than saying "Trish Levett is an Aboriginal artist, say Trish Levett is a Gundungurra artist."

## Developing Engaging and Creative Strategies for Learning with Contemporary Artworks

This is a guide to researching and developing your own creative learning strategies with artworks. You might like to use these strategies in your own classroom with images of artworks or in self-guided gallery visits.

### Looking and thinking

Spend time engaging with the artwork yourself;

- Take time to look carefully at the artwork or an image or video document of it.
- What is the first thing you notice about the artwork?
- Identify what it is that specifically draws you into the artwork and make a written note of these things.

### Find out more about the artist & the artwork

Take time to find out more about the artist and their artwork.

- Read the artist's statement/s in reference to the work.
- Find out the title, year made, media etc
- Engage in further research about the artists' practice.
- **Prioritise resources that centre the artist and their voice.**

### Consider the following and make a series of notes that highlight;

- the main ideas and intentions the artist has for the work
- the significance/connection of the materials and/or techniques, scale, installation etc to the ideas and intentions
- possible **talking points** to focus on when engaging with your students
- the artist's words and information they have provided, and their relevance to the **talking points, artwork and artists' practice**
- words in the artist's language/s that are relevant to the **talking points, artwork and artists' practice**
- the **context** in which the artist is working (place, time, art/social/political movements, communities etc) and its relevance to the **talking points, artwork and artists' practice**
- key elements that may be relevant for your students to make a **personal connection** with the artwork, artist's ideas and intentions and practice.

Use your research of the artwork and artist's practice to develop a new creative learning strategy for engagement with the artwork with.

- Choose only one or two talking points. These will be your focus for the strategy and everything will come back to them.
- Consider what you would like students to come away with. Remember to leave space for students to self-direct their learning and come away with things you hadn't planned for
- What opportunities does your strategy create for students to **share their own stories** and make meaningful, personal connections with the artwork and/or artist?
- Consider the materials and making in your strategy (if relevant), how do they support engagement with the **talking points, artwork and artists' practice**. **Remember:** They should in no way be appropriating the artist's intellectual property, like copying techniques, using the same materials etc. Refer to 'Is it cultural appropriation' flowchart for more information.
- How does your strategy **centre the artist's words** and information provided by the artist?

### Reflections for your strategy

Close your strategy by providing space for students to reflect on their learning. Ask one or two questions that bring their learning back to the original talking points.

### Creating hands on engagements with artworks

- How can your hands on engagement be a meaningful extension on some of the ideas and experiences students have had with the artwork?
- What opportunities does your studio session create for students to **share their own stories** and make meaningful, personal connections?
- Consider the materials and making in your extension, how do they support engagement with the **talking points, artwork** and **artists' practice**?
- words in the artist's language/s that are relevant to the **talking points, artwork** and **artists' practice**
- Reflect on your studio session to ensure that it **does not appropriate** the artist's intellectual property, like copying techniques, using the same materials etc.