



Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and learn. We pay respect to the First Nations Peoples and their Elders, past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Indigenous Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are also respectfully referred to within this Strategy as Indigenous Australians, First Australians and First Nations Peoples. Further, we acknowledge the unceded land, sea, and waterways of First Nations people; the sovereignty of First Nation peoples; the detrimental impacts invasion/colonisation have had and is having on First Nations peoples; and we acknowledge First Nations Self-Determination. This land is and will always be Aboriginal land.

Artwork

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Introduction

CQUniversity's Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2025-2028 identifies the development of a First Nations Curriculum Framework as an important step to embedding First Nations peoples' knowledges and perspectives across all higher education courses. Delivering a First Nations curriculum requires the critical application of content, pedagogies and scholarship into all areas of learning and teaching, as well as supporting academic staff with adequate resources and professional development opportunities (Page et al., 2019; Phillips, 2019).

The Curriculum Framework also aligns with commitments in the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022 - 2025 (p, 53):

Universities have Indigenous content in curricula that is meaningful, appropriately developed and appropriately resourced; and Universities ensure students graduate with an awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges.

Multiple reviews of higher education in Australia have emphasised the importance of curricula for improving graduate understanding of First Nations peoples' contemporary experiences and ensuring that graduates acquire the skills and attributes to meet the complex needs of community and industry (Behrendt et al., 2012; Bradley et al., 2008; Universities Australia, 2011). CQUniversity places a strong emphasis on offering students' career-focused learning options that meet emerging industry requirements, as well as knowledge about the issues impacting their communities. A First Nations curriculum supports our graduates to be highly capable of responding to changing workplace standards by offering innovative education, whilst providing opportunities for applied experience in a selected discipline or profession. It also contributes to culturally safe, inclusive and supportive learning and teaching environments that encourage student success (Frawley et al., 2017).

The CQUniversity Curriculum Framework 2025 should be read in conjunction with the First Nations Education and Student Success Strategy 2025-2028 and the First Nations Cultural Competency Framework 2023-2028.





Framework

The First Nations Curriculum Framework provides a best practice standard for course design and delivery. The Framework aligns with CQUniversity's Higher Education Qualifications Policy and Procedure, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures Graduate Attributes, and the Learning and Teaching Framework - which require that First Nations content is embedded into all courses. It also aligns with the Australian Qualifications Framework, and the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cwlth).

The First Nations Curriculum Framework applies to higher education programs commencing with diploma, advanced diploma, associate degree, and bachelor degree (including dual and double degrees). Postgraduate coursework or research higher degree (RHD) programs should also consider options to include content that aligns with the intent of this document.

The Framework is designed for flexibility to ensure that suitable content can be integrated systematically at the course level and provides guidance around the sequenced progression of learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment across multiple units in a course. Heads of Course and Unit Leads/ Coordinators will need to meet CQUniversity (re)accreditation requirements for courses and units, as well as accreditation from external professional practice or licensing bodies.

The Framework also recommends that content is integrated systematically when new courses and units are proposed, or when units or courses are revised during standard five yearly reviews. A thorough mapping of existing content and critical analysis of how First Nations knowledges, pedagogies and material can inform course and unit design should be undertaken as part of the review process and prior to the approval stage (see discussion in Appendix 1).

Decolonising the tertiary curriculum creates important openings for Indigenous knowledge but faces numerous obstacles within existing institutional structures. The tertiary education sector has lacked consistency in how the spectrum of course offerings can be redesigned to account for the depth and complexity of Indigenous cultural content and perspectives.

Boer & Fry, 2025, p.2

The First Nations Curriculum Framework 2025 provides guidance to embedding the required curriculum design features in achieving this outcome across CQUniversity's Higher Education courses.

Intergration of First Nations learning content



Optimal approaches to embedding First Nations curriculum involve a combination of vertical and horizontal embedding of content, as it offers the deep learning and development of reflexive skills required for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Coombe et al., 2017; Dudgeon, et al., 2016; Page et al., 2019; Zubrzycki et al., 2014).

HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION

Horizontal integration can be defined as the concurrent teaching of discipline specific or themed content throughout the curriculum, with linkages across subjects, and between theory and applied practice. Horizontal integration can provide the factual knowledge and application in a multidisciplinary framework, and ensure all students are exposed to this level of learning.

VERTICAL INTEGRATION

Vertical integration generally refers to planned linkages between learning activities throughout the learning continuum, building on learning through each stage of the course or teaching program (Coombe et al., 2017). Students generally undertake specialised subjects or units, each building on complexity and conceptual application of learning experiences, culminating in applied professional experience and capstone subjects. This allows students to master the requisite material, combined with professional practice and experience, and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) options to meet the requirements of a given profession.

First Nations related content will need to be integrated through successive years of a course and across AQF levels. Minimum volume for all courses are provided in Table 1. Content can be embedded in existing units in each year/level, as well as in specific or standalone First Nations units where this suits the course or discipline.

Learning material will need to be introduced in the first year of any course either in standalone First Nations specific core unit, and/or as content integrated within existing and new core units. Integration in first year units will ensure that material is normalised early, providing a foundation for learning so that issues and concepts can be revisited and expanded in units offered in later years (Page et al., 2019). As a minimum, introductory core units should include principles of cultural awareness and topics that cover First Nations histories, cultures and contemporary issues and provide a context to the wider discipline and/ or profession, in moving from cultural awareness to cultural safety and cultural competency (see CQUniversity First Nations Cultural Competency Framework 2023-2028).

Universities have Indigenous content in curricula that is meaningful, appropriately developed and appropriately resourced; and Universities ensure students graduate with an awareness of Indigenous values and knowledges.

Discipline content can be integrated into subsequent years through discipline component units, to scaffold on prior learning and enable students to apply their knowledge to the requirements of the discipline (Mathews et al., 2016). Extension majors and minors can also incorporate content, offering learning outcomes not offered in discipline units. Schools and Colleges will need to adopt the approach most suited to embedding content that meets these requirements. A Course Suite can share units with accredited First Nations content across courses.

Professional practice and experience

Professional Practice/Experience and WIL are important for graduates to gain experience within an applied professional, service delivery or community context. Professional Practice/ Experience and WIL units enable students to learn, apply and demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and is recommended for those disciplines and professions with applied service and business engagement in a First Nations context. Whilst many graduates may not work directly with First Nations peoples and their communities, many will be employed in positions that impact their lives (e.g., in policy, service delivery, or commercial activities) (Page et al., 2019). Given that service provision is not confined to First Nations registered organisations and their capacity may be limited, WIL placements should be sought in a broad array of organisations, businesses and government agencies.

Learning outcomes and assessment

As required by the CQUniversity
Assessment Policy and Procedure,
assessment items and their design will
need to align with the learning activities
and outcomes of the relevant content.
This applies to learning outcomes in First
Nations curriculum, including knowledges
and perspectives or generic skills related
to graduate attributes, which will need
to be formally assessed, with outcomes
specifically addressed in unit assessment
tasks (Universities Australia, 2019).

COURSE VOLUME

Deciding minimal course volume is strengthened by the guide provided in Table 1. As previously highlighted, both vertical and horizontal implementation is determined by the course discipline and the regulatory government and industry imposed content layers that crowd curriculum. It is within these contested design features that a minimal volume is recommended.

VOLUME CROWDING

Care is needed to avoid overloading units with First Nations curriculum, particularly with respect to stand-alone and/or common units. Over-loading units can produce additional challenges that adversely impacts the quality of teaching and student learning.





TABLE 1 MINIMUM COURSE VOLUMES

University course requirments			First Nations course content			
AQF qualification type	AQF level	Total No. of credit points (CPs), and course duration	Minimun No. of CPs (equivalent content)	National student workload minimum (hours)*	Minimum No. of units (equivalent)	Type of unit(s) -
Undergraduate certificate	5, 6 or 7	24 (0.5 yr)	NA	NA	NA	Introductory cultural competency module
Diploma	5	48 (1 yr)	NA	NA	NA	Introductory cultural competency module
Advanced Diploma	6	96 (2 yrs)	6	150	1	Core/discipline/extension
Associate Degree	6	96 (2 yrs)	6	150	1	Core/discipline/extension
Bachelor Degree	7	144-192 (3-4 yrs)	6-18	150-450	1-3	Core/discipline/extension
Dual and Double Degrees	7	192-216 (4-4.5 yrs)	6-18	150-450	1-3	Core/discipline/extension
Bachelor Honours Degree	8	48 (1 yr)	1	25	NA	Included in methods uni
Graduate Certificate (Coursework)	8	24 (0.5 yr)	NA	NA	NA	Introductory cultural competency module
Graduate Certificate (Research)	8	NA	1	25	NA	Introductory cultural competency module
Graduate Diploma	8	48 (1 yr)	NA	NA	NA	Introductory cultural competency module
Masters Degree (Coursework)	9	48-96 (1-2 yrs)	3-6	750-150	0.5-1	Introductory and/or advanced level units
Masters Degree (Research)	9	NA	NA	NA	NA	Included in methods uni (where applicable)
Doctoral Degree (Professional)	10	NA	NA	NA	NA	Included in methods uni (where applicable)
Doctoral Degree	10	NA	NA	NA	NA	Included in methods unit (where applicable)



Sequence for embedding content

Bachelor degree courses will need to adopt a sequenced progression to embed content and learning activities in core, discipline and/ or extension units (covering introductory, intermediate and advanced AQF levels 5-7).

In a bachelor course students would need to complete a minimum of 1-3 units (equivalent) with accredited First Nations content, which equates to 6-18 credit points with content across a study plan – see Table 1 and Diagram 1 below.

DIAGRAM 1: SEQUENCING ACROSS YEAR LEVELS

YEAR 1

Foundation Knowledge

First Nations content focuses on Cultural Awareness and embedded in either standalone core unit and/or embedded across core units.

YEARS 2 & 4

Discipline Integration

First Nations content is focused on Cultural Safety and embedded in discipline and/or extension units (major and/or minor).

YEARS 3 & 4

Application to the Profession

First Nations content is focused on Cultural Competency and embedded in its discipline application.

The non-credit bearing online micro credential First Nations Cultural Awareness is recommended for all students prior to commencement of a course.

1. Foundation knowledge:

First Nations cultures, histories and contemporary realities, combined with an introduction and context to the discipline area.

Core unit(s) in year 1: content to be integrated within:

- > Standalone First Nations unit: or
- > Embedded content in core units as modules and learning activities linked to assessment.

2. Discipline integration:

Building on the core knowledge acquired in the first year requires a comprehensive and indepth application of First Nations perspectives and experiences to the discipline area (Cultural Safety topics or modules can include critical evaluation of norms and practices relevant to the discipline and the learning of skills in inter-cultural communication).

Discipline and extension unit(s) in years 2-4:

> Embedded content in discipline and/or extension units as either major or minors (minimum 4 credit points). Modules or topic content is linked to learning activities and to assessment tasks.

3. Application to the profession:

Integrate theoretical learning with applied practice to enable students to demonstrate skills and knowledge relevant to their course of study and future profession or career. Cultural Competency reflects application within the organisational and/or institutional levels. This includes application of advanced knowledge and skills in intercultural engagement in a professional/workplace context.

Professional Practice/Experience and Work Integrated Learning (recommended):

Incorporated as assessable component in disciplines with recognised service or professional applications with First Nations clients or industry. WIL can include work placements, project work or simulated workplaces. Table 2 below provides an example of a course structure for the CQUniversity Bachelor of Laws (see Gainsford, et al., 2021). This 'mapping' is not exhaustive and additional or alternative units could incorporate content relevant to the unit synopsis or learning objectives.



TABLE 2: EXAMPLE FIRST NATIONS CONTENT IN CQUNIVERSITY BACHELOR OF LAWS

Cross Cultural Competency for Students: It starts with micro credential described above.

Years 1-2: Foundation

Standalone First Nations core unit:

1. Australian First Nations People and Law: (LAWS 1107): Unit introduces the major legal and policy issues relevant to First Nations Peoples in Australia. Topics will include colonisation. racial and intersectional discrimination, criminal justice, land rights and native title, Treaty-making, Indigenous Voice, and international law under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Debates around contemporary issues and law reform will be considered.

and/or

Embedded in core units (minimum x):

Core units (examples):

- 1. Criminal Law (LAWS 11060). Topics covering First Nations peoples' representation in the criminal justice system. Contemporary issues relevant to First Nations communities, including the issue of 'targeted' law reform, policy powers, access to justice, and its implications for diverse communities and vulnerable groups.
- 2. Constitutional Law (LAWS 11065). Topics covering First Nations peoples and constitutional law; state and federal governments and treaties; 1967 Citizenship Referendum; High Court and shaping legislative power on the Mabo decision; constitutional law reform and the Voice to Parliament.

Years 2-4: Discipline

Embedded in units (minimum x):

Core units (examples):

- 1. Foundations of Property Law (LAWS 12066). Topics related to Aboriginal Freehold and Leasehold title in Queensland, Native Title.
- 2. Evidence and Proof (LAWS 13010). Interpret and apply common law and statutory rules of evidence in the Queensland and Commonwealth jurisdictions, including First Nations perspectives.
- 3. Legal Professional Conduct (LAWS 13013). First Nations crosscultural communication skills.

and/or

Extension Units Electives (examples):

- 1. Public International and Human Rights Law (LAWS12070). Topics covering First Nations rights under international law: selfdetermination, cultural, social and economic rights, selfgovernance, state and treaties, and control over law, justice and education etc.
- 2. Family Law (LAWS13011). Topics provide an understanding of the legislation and case law and its application to First Nations families in a community context.
- 3. Innovation and Intellectual property Law (LAWS 12068). Topics related to First Nations intellectual property, traditional and contemporary knowledge and commercialisation.

Professional Practice/Experience

Offered in core unit:

1. Legal Practicum (LAWS 12073). Domestic placement, social innovation project, international study tour, or workplace simulation in a First Nations legal context.

First Nations voices in curriculum

To ensure best practice during the design, review and accreditation of First Nations content, the process should be conducted in consultation with appropriate First Nations representatives or advisors (Universities Australia, 2019). Providing such representation underpins a collaborative and partnership-based approach to higher education course delivery.

It will ensure that the teaching and presentation of First Nations perspectives is responsive to the requirements identified by industry, professional bodies and community, and is respectful of local cultures (Universities Australia, 2011). Collaborating with external First Nations advisors and discipline specialists will enable an important body of knowledges and expertise to be normalised in content and pedagogies across the scope of courses and units delivered at CQUniversity (Boer & Fry, 2025). All engagement (where there is substantial investment) with First Nations representatives will be remunerated, with appropriate respect and recognition afforded people for their advice and services.

Heads of Course and Unit Leads/Coordinators or equivalent are recommended to engage with relevant external First Nations advisors during the design, review, and (re)accreditation of courses and units. Advisors can include Elders, industry representatives, practitioners, employers, community representatives and senior academic leaders from other institutions. External representation can also be considered for membership of Course Reference Committees and Course Review Panels, however, consideration will need to be given to demands on time, and capacity to provide such reviews.

Course review, approval and governance

The design, evaluation and approval of First Nations content across courses are overseen by the relevant course reference committee and Curriculum Committee. It is expected that each review process factors internal and external First Nations members with expertise in learning and teaching in the higher education sector, and from industry professions and/or disciplines.

Governance of this Framework resides with the education Strategy and Innovation Committee (ESIC).





APPENDIX 1.

Pedagogical approaches

The following provides a short introduction to the First Nations pedagogies and learning and teaching approaches that have informed curriculum in higher education. Numerous texts are available in this area, as is applied literature on integrating knowledge and perspectives into curriculum across all disciplines. Learning and teaching staff are encouraged to engage in the wider literature as well as case studies and applied examples relevant to the discipline. This is particularly relevant given strategic strengthening of the Teaching Scholar, and as reflected within the First Nations Cultural Competency Framework 2023-2028.

Embedding of First Nations peoples' knowledges and perspectives in the curriculum is a challenging and often contested process in the decolonisation of academic institutions (Boer & Fry, 2025). Central to these debates is the interrogation of the disciplinary power and control colonialism still holds in First Nations Australian Studies in terms of how First Nations peoples are understood and represented, and how race and privilege act as mechanisms to sustain such authority (Moreton-Robinson, 2006). Course designers need to acknowledge the diverse and unique knowledge frameworks, and the teaching and learning philosophies and practices of First Nations peoples that are distinct and often entirely separate from Western based systems (Acton et al., 2017). Such knowledges are often multi-dimensional, encompassing the technological, social, economic, philosophical, spiritual, educational, legal and political elements of their particular cultures, interwoven with their connection to place and Country (Yunkaporta, 2009). Knowledges can be context-specific to a given community's lived experience, as well as being dynamic and adaptive to changing environmental and social conditions.

The interaction of these complex knowledges within disciplinary settings can be informed by the Cultural Interface, a widely recognised approach to First Nations perspectives in curriculum design (Nakata, 2007). The Cultural Interface is a contested space in which the complexities of First Nations peoples ways of knowing, being and doing can be co-developed alongside or in opposition to Western based epistemological and ontological positions. Educators should not simply place or add First Nations peoples' knowledge into the existing course curricula, as understanding of such knowledge is mediated by Western intellectual traditions (Bullen and Flavell, 2022). What is required is a critical reframing built upon such concepts of reciprocity, relationships, inclusivity and recognition of the value of alternative ways through which learning and teaching are conducted. The Cultural Interface is also an unsettling learning domain where students need to be challenged about their existing frames of reference (Boer & Fry, 2025; Nakata, 2007). Such a transformational learning experience supports a critical evaluation of how a student's worldview(s), including their disciplinary/ professional lens, shapes their approach to knowledge and lived experiences. An individual's frame of reference can be transformed through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which their interpretations, beliefs and habits of mind or points of view are based (Mezirow, 1997).

There are various pedagogies that can inform learning and teaching in this area such as Indigenous pedagogies, critical pedagogies, decolonising discourse and Indigenous standpoint theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and transformative pedagogies.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy is focused on understanding how relations shape the learning and teaching environment and seeks to question the selective values and assumptions about what knowledge is legitimate, and how processes and future scenarios are normalised (Giroux, 2020). The emphasis in critical pedagogy is unveiling inequalities, and reflection and action as pathways to change, and towards a reconciled future and equitable relations between First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples (Mackinlay and Barney, 2014).

In decolonising discourse linked to critical pedagogies, the emphasis is placed upon the ways that education operates as a site for colonial power, whereby classrooms, curricula, and educational communities are deeply implicated in the reproduction of inequalities. Accordingly, decolonisation requires a transformative praxis that delivers fundamental rights and ensures that First Nations peoples, politics and pedagogies are not acculturated by western ideas of equity and justice. Graduate attributes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, reflective practice, ethics, and communication can all be used as frames to explore the interconnections with First Nations focused cultural competence and to challenge western knowledge systems, leading to institutional change (Boer & Fry, 2025; Harvey & Russel-Mundine, 2019).

INDIGENOUS STANDPOINT PEDAGOGY

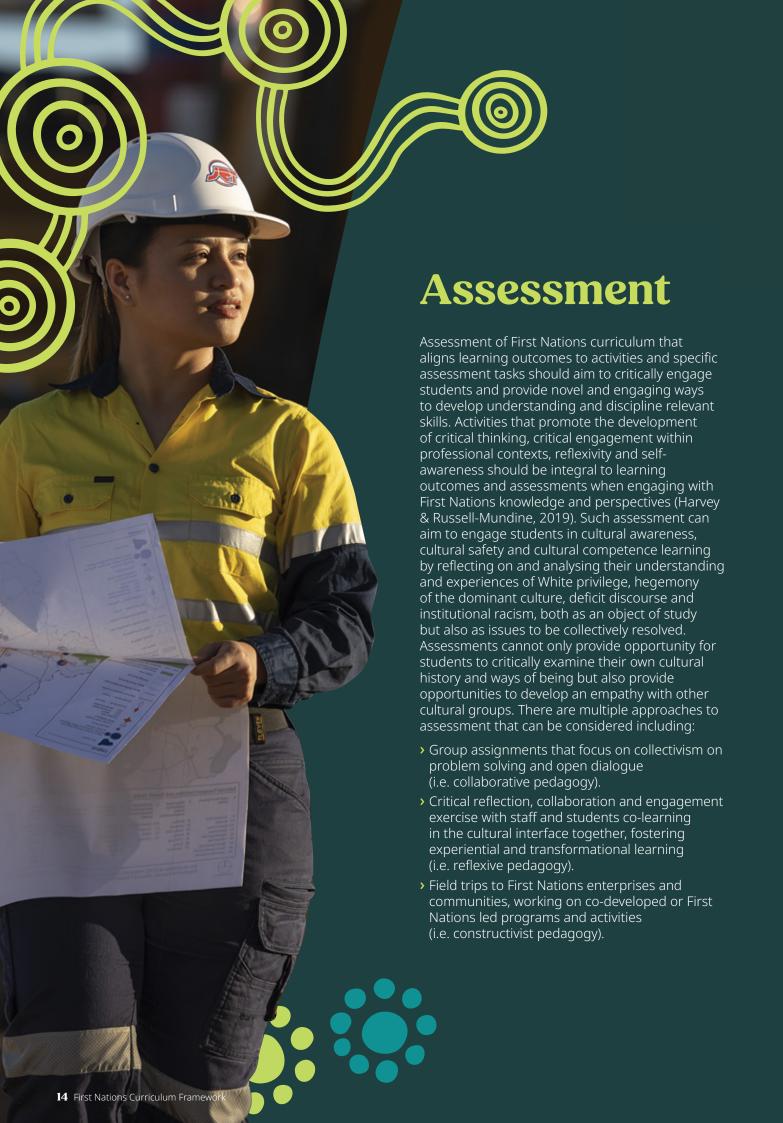
'Indigenous standpoint pedagogy stems from Indigenist approaches that privilege and authorise Indigenous peoples' knowledges, experiences, and worldview understandings of colonisation within a decolonising pedagogical framework (Philips, 2019, p. 8).' 'It is centered by the understanding that there is ongoing structural silencing that reproduces and reinvents the experiences of First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples in ways that limit access to alternative narratives. Indigenist standpoint pedagogy is an inherently reformative, relational, and critically reflexive framework that supports and facilitates the reintegration of First Nations knowledge perspectives in ways that interrupt the enduring impact of the colonial narrative (Philips, 2019, p. 8).'

Indigenous standpoint theory can complement decolonisation approaches by interrogating and transforming understandings associated with the dominant culture as it addresses racism. This theory enables critical investigation of how white people's identities and positions are shaped by racialised cultures, and how the invisibility and seamless acceptance of whiteness and White power and privilege remain as mechanisms that sustain a Western cultural pyramid of authority that functions to reproduce the destructive and costly road of cultural imperialism (Boer & Fry, 2025; Moreton-Robinson, 2006).

Indigenous pedagogy combines the intellectual with the individual or collective experiences and allows for interaction between the circumstances in which people find themselves and their understanding or belief systems that inform those circumstances (Battiste, 2019). Indigenous pedagogies are often founded on principles of respect, sharing, negotiation and listening, and cooperative learning styles that allow students and instructors to learn from each other. Alongside dialogue and interaction with peers, Indigenous pedagogy allows students to observe, listen and participate with a minimum of intervention or instruction. An example of Indigenous Australian pedagogies is the 'Eight Ways of Learning' model, or 'common-ground' pedagogical framework, which is based on the premise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives come from Indigenous processes of knowledge transmission (see https://www.8ways.online/about). The Eight Ways of Learning model is expressed as eight interconnected pedagogies involving narrative-driven learning, visualised learning plans, hands-on/reflective techniques, use of symbols/metaphors, land-based learning, indirect/ synergistic logic, modeled/scaffolded genre mastery, and connectedness to community.

Culturally responsive pedagogy, by contrast, is an approach to teaching and learning that uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Morrison et al., 2019). Culturally inclusive and responsive learning promotes the equal participation of students in learning by integrating the diversity of their cultural backgrounds, and through respecting and complementing the cultural diversity and philosophy of others. Inclusive pedagogy means that educators accommodate the diverse learning needs of students, whilst enabling students to explore and reflect on their own cultural assumptions, beliefs, and values (Boer & Fry, 2025). Students should be encouraged and supported to bring their cultural experiences and perspectives into the learning experience, by creating a culturally safe and supportive teaching environment and promoting equity (Dreamson et al., 2017).







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