

Transforming psychology for the next generation



Belle Selkirk

As a Noongar woman and Indigenous clinical psychologist, I have been navigating Western healthcare for almost fifteen years. Like many before me, I am all too familiar with the urgent need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in psychology education and practice in Australia. A need that springs from the immense value that our ways of knowing, being and doing brings, as well as the historical silencing of Indigenous knowledge systems in psychology.

In the early 2000s when I completed my undergraduate degree, there was minimal reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures in psychology. I remember feeling a sense of confusion about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges fit within the psychology I was being taught. For the most part, I learnt there was "one psychology" that is universally applied to all peoples. Culture and diversity were largely absent in the psychology curriculum. Sadly, succeeding in my psychology studies required compliance with these colonial messages. Even after completing my Master of Psychology at the end of 2008, there were further colonial hoops to navigate throughout my registrar program to become a registered clinical psychologist: hoops that weren't inclusive of my cultural identity or the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. The journey of becoming a clinical psychologist was enacted through a colonial lens. This is a common story for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples pursuing qualifications in Western systems.

When Bardi woman and leader in Indigenous psychology Professor Pat Dudgeon invited me to join the deadly Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) in



Noongar woman Belle Selkirk won the Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) Excellence in Cultural Responsiveness award in 2024.

2021, I jumped. AIPEP is a groundbreaking initiative striving to decolonise psychology education and practice in Australia. Our work is ambitious and wide reaching. We work with universities across Australia in a national community of practice to decolonise psychology curricula, better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students, and increase the cultural responsiveness of future psychologists in Australia. We work closely with psychology regulators and professional associations to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and representation in the discipline. We develop culturally-informed resources and guidance documents, present webinars to build capacity, and engage in research aimed to decolonise curricula, support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students, and amplify Indigenous knowledges in psychology.

Psychology is transforming so that it rightfully includes other diverse groups. I see this in the incredible increase of Indigenous psychologists and students studying in the area. Also, in the new knowledges by Indigenous psychologists and mental health professionals. Finally, the ongoing work of AIPEP continues to deepen and expand. Just last month I was so proud to see the launch of the new edition of *Psychology: from Inquiry to Understanding* published by Pearson Australia. It is Australia's

first Indigenous-edited undergraduate psychology textbook. Professor Pat Dudgeon is the executive editor and myself and my colleague, Dr Joanna Alexi, were assistant editors. Importantly, it privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and contexts. Chapter 2 on Indigenous Psychology features foundational knowledges all psychology students, and registered psychologists, will benefit from. We strengthened Indigenous authorship and resources and placed greater emphasis on the diversity of peoples, cultures and contexts in psychology. The Social and Emotional Wellbeing model and principles of cultural safety and responsiveness are featured throughout the text. These are vital elements in decolonising psychology education and practice in Australia.

This year's NAIDOC theme "The Next Generation: strength, vision, and legacy" captures the decolonising movement in psychology. I, like many of my peers, am eternally thankful for the strength, vision and legacy of the Indigenous leaders in psychology who have paved the way for the future generation of Indigenous psychologists. Their collective work and advocacy over many decades have led to a space-and-time where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, such as Social and Emotional Wellbeing, are a core part of psychology university

education. Their vision, strength and legacy has enabled the groundbreaking work of AIPEP and publications like the new textbook. Back in the 2000s when I was doing my psychology studies, I never could have imagined I would see this kind of book in my education, let alone have a part in it. I am privileged to be a part of the movement in the discipline of psychology whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and lived experiences are celebrated.

Honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and lived-in experiences in psychology education and practice benefits everyone. Thanks to the Indigenous leaders before me, psychology is transforming. The work of AIPEP, and changes in psychology I am witnessing, fills me with optimism.

I see a future where there is an even more robust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology workforce, and a discipline that deeply respects our ways. My hope is that the current and future generations of aspiring Indigenous psychologists see their culture and lived experiences reflected in their psychology education and enter into the profession. And I hope that if they do, they will feel supported, and their experiences and knowledges validated and valued.

There is still work to be done of course but I feel that it's within our grasp.

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This article is part of a series of Koori Mail columns about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention contributed by authors associated with the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATISIP) at the University of Western Australia, which was established in 2017 to develop and share evidence about effective suicide-prevention approaches for Indigenous people and communities.