

Valuing Indigenous knowledges and experiences in education



Dr Abby-Rose Cox

Education has always been an important part of my life and a quote which has forever stuck with me is from the amazing Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". I grew up in Broome and spent most of my life trying to understand Western systems so I would be able to make a difference in my community. Although I attended boarding school in Perth and studied at the University of Melbourne and in Canada, I always returned home, back to my Country to be refuelled for the next adventure. The Kimberley has always been home, and I have never strayed away from it for long.

Research, in a Western sense, was not something I grew up around, although I do believe my people have been researching for hundreds of thousands of years. After completing my teaching degree, I began working as a secondary teacher in the Kimberley. After a couple of years, I moved onto providing academic and social and emotional wellbeing support to Aboriginal university students in Perth. After moving through these educational spaces, I developed a love and passion for social and emotional wellbeing – something very important for us all. I began by working as a frontline worker in social and emotional wellbeing programs around the Kimberley but felt I needed to learn more and understand more about Indigenous ways of developing and assessing First Nations mental health.

After working through different academic and educational spaces, it was brought to my awareness that Western psychology wasn't always the right "fit" for Aboriginal students seeking wellbeing support. I decided to pursue a PhD to analyse the impacts of culturally strong social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal young people, while working for my local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services (KAMS) and the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance (KAHRA). At KAMS I worked alongside



Dr Abby-Rose Cox and Professor Pat Dudgeon.

amazing Aboriginal leaders who have worked tirelessly to improve the health trajectories of our people.

As the Evaluation and Research Manager at KAHRA, I was able to understand and contribute to the important work

of our leaders. This was by flipping the way research had been done for a very long time in the Kimberley and ensuring Aboriginal people were at the centre of everything we did. This was done in a variety of ways, including ensuring Aboriginal

people were involved as investigators, authors and paid participants in research projects.

After completing my PhD, I was offered an incredible opportunity to work with someone I admired and looked up to – whose work I had read,

referenced and studied for a very long time – Professor Pat Dudgeon. Academia was not a path I had considered but this opportunity was too good to be true, and I joined the amazing University of Western Australia team. Although still in the early stages, I have been lucky enough to be provided with an opportunity to join the incredible ARC Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures (the Indigenous Futures Centre), run through the University of Queensland. I have had the chance to join a team of remarkable First Nations postdoctoral fellows who bring together a wealth of knowledge, experience and wisdom. It is crucial to have the support and guidance of other First Nations scholars when navigating a space so challenging and different to what we are used to.

From the beginnings of my education journey at boarding school, through to being a postdoc, I can say that having other First Nations people surround me and relate to me has been the biggest factor in being able to successfully navigate the education system and make a difference. Throughout my career I have seen firsthand the importance of valuing and prioritising First Nations knowledges in all aspects of education. This is through Indigenous methods of research being recognised and respected, putting Aboriginal peoples at the centre of research, and the support and guidance of other First Nations scholars. I feel honoured and privileged to be in my position and I am really looking forward to creating meaningful research to benefit our communities.

Abby-Rose Cox is a member of the Nimunburr community with connections to Kija in the East Kimberley. Her experiences of teaching, primarily with Aboriginal youth, has been a driving force in pursuing a career in research. She recently completed her PhD looking at culturally strong social and emotional wellbeing programs to support Aboriginal young people in schools and joined UWA as a postdoctoral researcher. Prior to this, Abby worked as the Evaluation and Research Manager at the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance in Broome. Abby is passionate about transforming research to ensure First Nations people are involved in every stage of the research journey. Currently, Abby is working as a Research Fellow at the Indigenous Futures Centre, looking at experiences of racism, with a vision to develop resources to support others to demonstrate warriorship in the face of racism.

The Indigenous Futures Centre brings together First Nations researchers across the land and seas to share their knowledge and experiences to produce evidence-based research and create meaningful change in our communities. Centre members came together this year in Sydney for the first Indigenous Futures Centre Symposium; it was an opportunity for us all to discuss our projects and plan interdisciplinary research across all centre themes.



The Indigenous Futures Centre Symposium in Sydney in 2025.