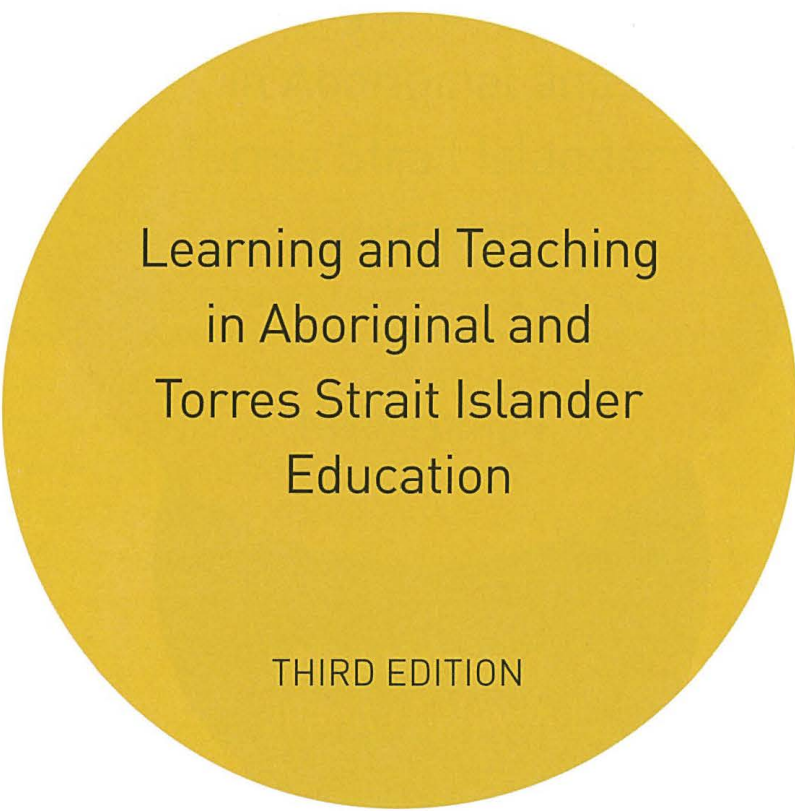


Learning *and* Teaching
in Aboriginal *and*
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Education

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NEIL HARRISON
JUANITA SELLWOOD

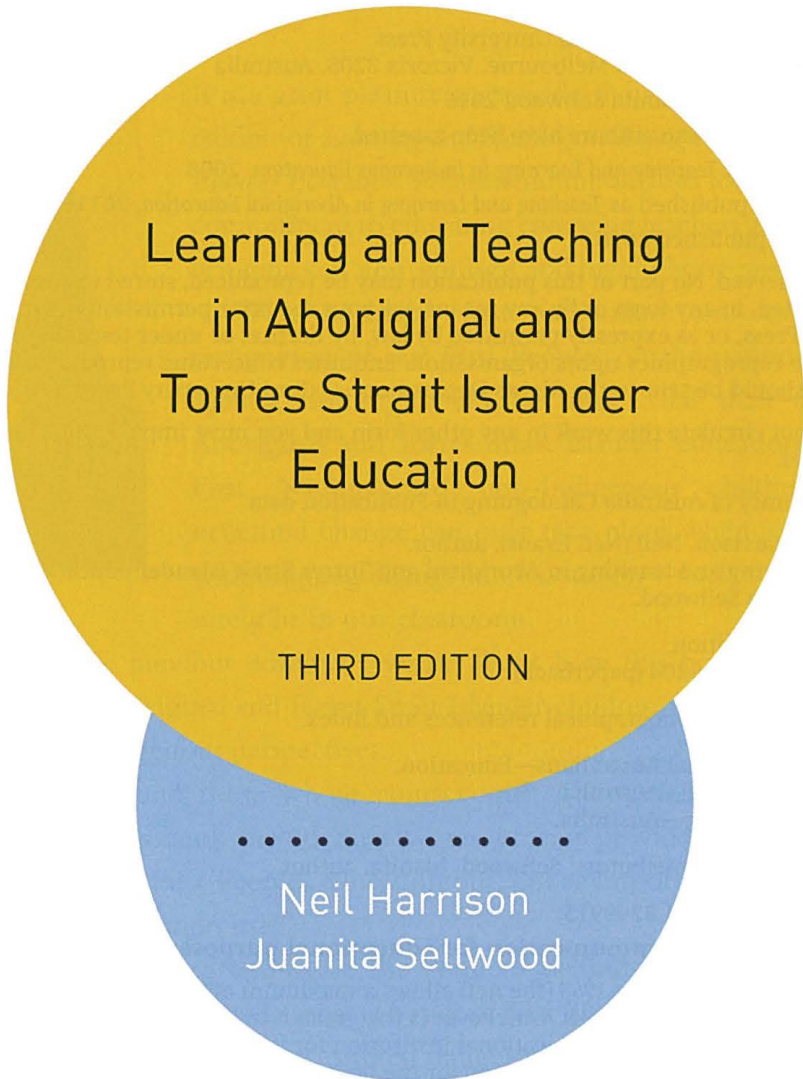
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Learning and Teaching
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Education

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Neil Harrison
Juanita Sellwood

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FOREWORD

The Hon. Linda Burney MP



It is a great pleasure to provide the foreword for the third edition of *Learning and Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*. I commend the authors for their ongoing commitment to educating emerging teachers and educators, bringing out new editions and highlighting new trends.

With Australia's first referendum on constitutional recognition of our First Peoples on the nation's political agenda, nothing could be more vital than furthering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for both First Nations and non-Indigenous children. Broad structural change can only take place when it is coupled with ongoing change in civil society—such a genesis must surely be in our classrooms.

In my forewords to the previous editions I wrote about how this book helps fill the gap between the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children around learning Indigenous perspectives.

For many new teachers, and those whose contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is limited, this book provides a vital resource; it provides a framework for teaching the ideas involved in First Peoples education but, just as importantly, it encourages teacher engagement with the notion itself.

This third edition continues to emphasise the contexts behind each of the strategies provided. Every chapter recognises the relationship between First Nations and other Australians but does not shy away from acknowledging its often fraught nature.

New to this edition is the authors' decision to include an increased focus on Torres Strait Islander perspectives—acknowledging the diversity that exists within the First People's community. There are also new chapters on students talking about racism in schools; developing school-community partnerships; the Stolen Generations and the impacts of intergenerational trauma; teaching the creative arts and science; and extensive sections devoted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in urban areas.

With its focus on preservice and new educators, the readability of the book is its real strength. I have not read any other resource that is better tailored to address the challenges facing young educators regarding programming and building relationships within the school environment. Embedded video links also ensure the relevance and contemporary nature of the book's contents.

What I enjoyed in the previous issues—and is continued here—is the interesting mix of personal experiences and narratives from Neil, Juanita and the other contributors. These narratives bring the world of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education alive and place it in a real world context.

This edition of *Learning and Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education* continues to draw together so many strands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education from the last thirty years. It also maintains its tradition of building the groundwork for a far more enjoyable and equitable school experience for children and their educators and I highly commend it.

*The Hon. Linda Burney MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for Education
Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs*

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PREFACE

Learning and Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education acknowledges the diversity of Indigenous identities, living and working on the many different *Countries* across Australia, from urban to rural and remote areas. We feel that the role of the student's cultural identity in learning has been downplayed in recent years with much of the attention placed on teacher quality and various forms of teacher instruction. While good teaching is obviously important, the best teacher will not succeed in Indigenous education without developing close links with the child's family and community. *Working closely with the local community* is absolutely crucial in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, and the critical importance of keeping things local is one of the most important messages of this book. Keeping things local can help both the teacher and the student to avoid the perpetuation of stereotypes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We have become increasingly concerned over the claim that 'good teaching is good teaching for all students'. These kinds of statements seem to represent yet more attempts to downgrade the importance of cultural background and identity in the provision of quality Australian education. So what is the difference between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, and the education of any other student in Australian schools? First, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not just another equity or ethnic minority group; they are the **First and original owners of Australia**. That must be recognised and accepted by all Australians in the national desire for reconciliation and equal partnerships. The future of Indigenous education must therefore be on mending the broken relation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Second, **learning is a social practice** for so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, while for most non-Indigenous students, learning is constructed as a cognitive process where individuals are expected to make meaning for themselves. A third significant difference is reflected in how **future aspirations** are not a strong motivating force for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The term *future aspirations* is culturally bound in the theories of education and enlightenment in Western countries, and we need to be careful in assuming that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend school because they want a better life. Such an assumption merely functions to pathologise the lives of Indigenous people.

This third edition of *Learning and Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education* has been substantially revised to include people and voices from Torres Strait education. The previous edition focused only on Aboriginal education. The new edition includes many new features:

- new Torres Strait Islander perspectives from Juanita Sellwood embedded throughout the book
- an increased focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in urban areas, including case studies outlining what teachers are doing in the classroom

- video links embedded throughout
- an ongoing focus on *Learning from Country* as a key concept for Indigenous people
- a new chapter that discusses the creative arts and science education for secondary schools
- a new Chapter 1 on racism in schools,
- a new Chapter 3 on the Stolen Generations
- a thoroughly revised and updated Chapter 4 on strategies for teaching both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- a revised chapter on classroom management
- a new chapter on the role of a student's first language in learning
- a revised chapter on teaching reading and writing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- a new chapter on schools developing partnerships with the community, by Gina Milgate.

Chapter 1 begins with a letter from Anna to her Year 8 class. You may remember Anna from her photos in the first two editions of this book. She is now 14 years of age, and already has experiences of school to pass on to the reader. Several Aboriginal students studying for their teaching degrees then respond to Anna's letter about racism in her class.

Chapter 2 focuses on Australian history as a way of setting the scene in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. So much of what happens in the classroom today is governed by our history of colonisation and the impact of Australian government policies, and impacts become apparent as you read the later chapter on strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This chapter includes a school case study set within the urban context.

Ivan Clarke talks about his experiences as a member of the Stolen Generations in Chapter 3 to provide insights into the ongoing impact of colonisation and Australian government policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Chapter 4 presents a range of strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and begins with a case study of the Blacktown Girls High Yarn Circle.

Chapter 5 explores various issues around identifying talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, while Chapter 6 identifies key issues relating to classroom management. These issues are set within a school case study, based in Cairns.

Chapter 7 articulates an explicit approach to teaching reading to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It includes a case study of a school in north-east Arnhem land.

Chapter 8 explores the role of the student's first language in the classroom, while Chapter 9 focuses on the importance of working with your local community. This chapter includes a case study of a school in rural New South Wales.

Chapter 10 is about Learning from Country and what that means for Creative Arts and Science teachers in urban, as well as regional and remote areas.

The final chapter documents the experiences of beginning teachers in schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

We welcome your feedback on any aspect of the book. We would particularly like to hear from those who are applying what they have read and learnt here to their classroom practice. Please email us at <neil.harrison@mq.edu.au> or <juanita.sellwood@jcu.edu.au>.

Neil Harrison and Juanita Sellwood

January 2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



We want to begin by acknowledging that this book was collectively written on the ancestral lands of many traditional owners in Australia.

In many ways, this book has grown out of the recognition that good teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is about building strong contacts with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. We are therefore most grateful to the Hon. Linda Burney, the Member for Canterbury, for writing the Foreword to this third edition of *Learning and Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*.

I would like to thank those who contributed learning experiences to this book:

Anna Wommatakimmi-Chapman, Darwin

JB Wommatakimmi-Chapman, Darwin

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Dorothy Johns, Macquarie University

Annie Winters, Sydney

Ivan Clarke, NSW Health

Emily Menz, Lightning Ridge Central School

Chris Sarra, Founder and chairman of the *Stronger Smarter Institute*

Brian Giles-Browne, Coonamble Public School

Damien Howard

Natalie Taylor, Murray Farm Public School

Genienne Ellis, Oxley Vale Public School

Kathryn Prior, Wilcannia Central School

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John Greatorex, Mäpuru Christian School, Northern Territory

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Belinda Murray, Hurstville South Public School

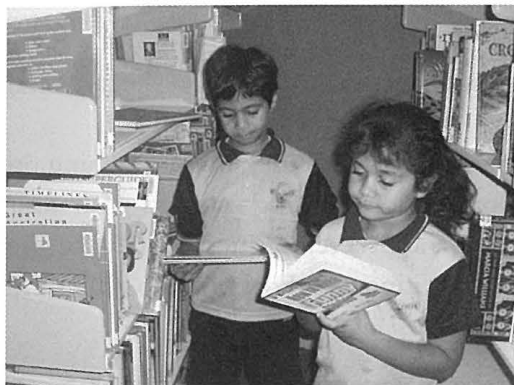
Bob Fuller, University of New South Wales

Ghillar, Michael Anderson, Creative Spirits

There are also many special people I have met along the way who have quite unconsciously inspired me to reflect on my vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, including one of my great teachers, Kathy Gothadjaka, as well as Stephen Harris, Terry Ngarritjan-Kessarais, Michael Christie, Merridy Malin, Graham Gower, Martin Nakata, Susan Page. Ivan Clarke has demonstrated to myself and many others how reconciliation is done, rather than taught.

Julie Chapman and her two children JB and Anna have again been instrumental in bringing *Learning and Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education* alive with their photos in

this new edition. As you can see, they have grown considerably since the release of the first edition in 2008. They have important experiences to present, in the first chapter of this book.



The expert editorial assistance and guidance of Laura Rentsch at Oxford University Press, and Carolyn Leslie, our copyeditor, has ensured that you receive a substantially revised and highly accessible third edition. Finally, I would like to make special mention of my partner Jackie for her extraordinary support and patience throughout the writing and rewriting of this text.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Neil Harrison



I have taught in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education for many years, and I continue to find it inspiring and exciting. New challenges constantly arise and life is rarely boring, even after so many years in the job. I like working with Indigenous children and their parents because I can relax, and I love working across cultures because I learn a lot about myself through other people. I am sure that you will have the same enjoyable and fulfilling experiences that I continue to have with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of all ages. (See my experiences as a beginning teacher in Chapter 11.)

I grew up on a farm in western Victoria and went to university in Melbourne. After completing my teaching degree in 1978, I applied for a job in the Northern Territory, and soon found myself teaching at a small school in Arnhem Land. I assumed that I would stay there for six months and then return to Melbourne, but I remained for 24 years. I learnt so much in the first four years of teaching in bilingual schools because I was team teaching with Aboriginal teachers. These teachers taught me much of what I know; they also inspired me to remain in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The students in turn were bemused by my illiteracy; they would ask for the English names of plants and animals but I could only rarely provide them with an answer. The critical importance of setting the learning of Indigenous knowledge and histories within the school's local community is perhaps the most important message of this book. *Keeping the learning local* helps teachers and students to avoid some of stereotypes and generalisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Juanita Sellwood

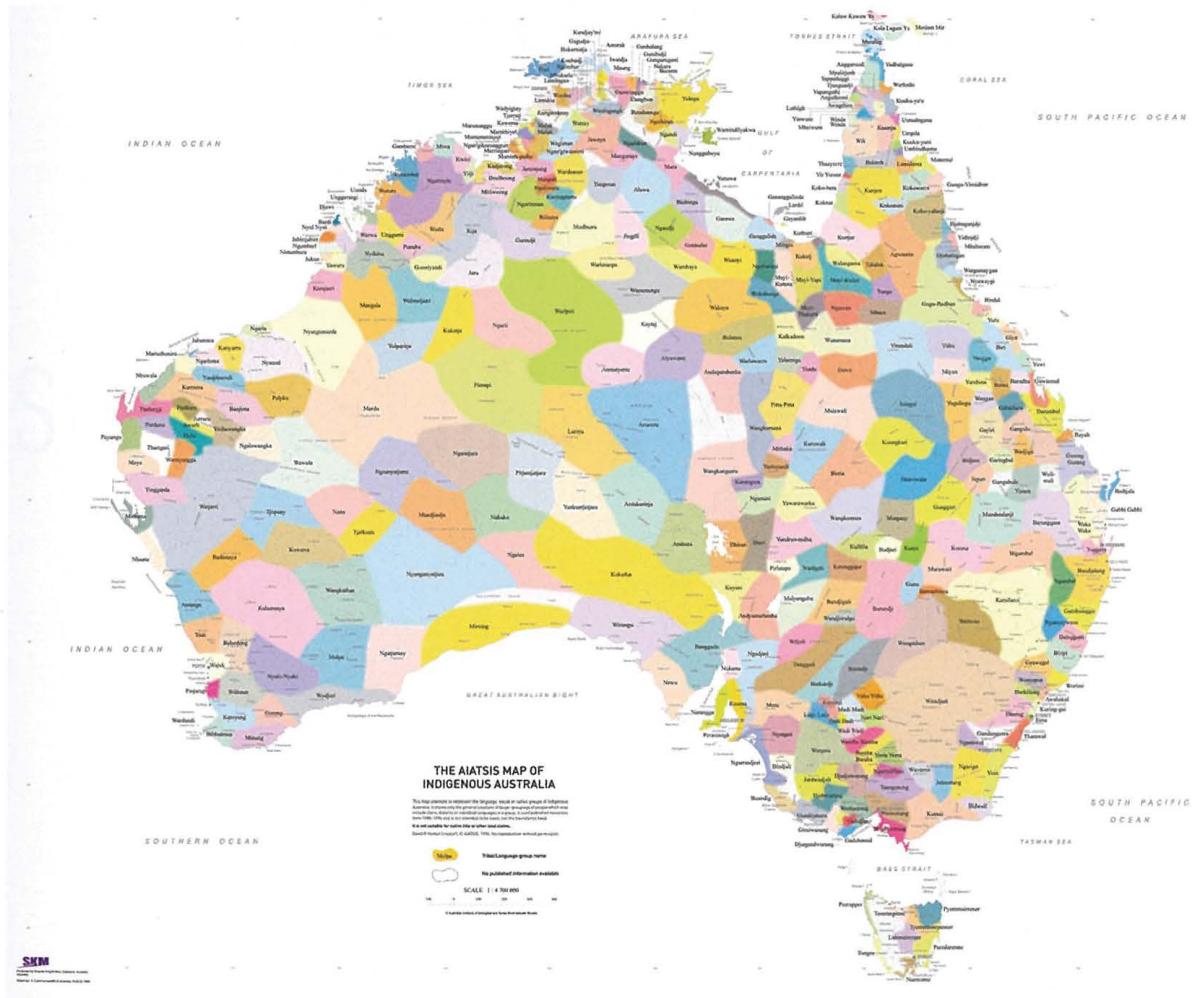


I began work as a primary school teacher at a local school in Cairns in 2001. I studied at my local university even though I had been offered a place at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane. At the time I felt Brisbane would be too far away from family. As a Torres Strait Islander, being close to family is the centre point of life so I decided to accept a place closer to home at James Cook University in Townsville. (See the story of my family, from page 34.)

I entered university in the early nineties through an equity education program called the Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program (AITEP). This program was one of the pioneering, affirmative action programs designed to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders access to teacher education with the purpose of bringing their cultural experience into classrooms for the benefit of all children but especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. My university studies were an eye-opener. This was the first time I began to learn about the colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I was shocked and at the same time I was nourished by learning about this perspective of history and about the history of our people. Throughout my university studies I began to realise just how important it was for me and my AITEP peers to succeed and become teachers.

I successfully graduated with my teaching degree and was happily teaching in a school in Cairns that had one of the highest numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. From my experience of teaching in this school, I could see how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parents came to me and another Indigenous teacher for support. A few years later I was asked to do some work at James Cook University in pre-service teacher education, and saw this as a great opportunity to build pre-service teachers' capacity to more effectively teach our children.

AIATSIS MAP OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA



This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988 and 1994, this map attempts to represent all the language or tribal or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people, which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. This map is NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS. David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996. No reproduction allowed without permission.

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