AIATSIS

AIATSIS Guide to evaluating and selecting education resources

Powered by the AIATSIS Code of Ethics
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The AIATSIS logo is derived from the Koko Bera-Kungen Shield created by George Wilson, Claude Ponto and John William Malcolm. The logo was first published by the Institute's Council in 1963. Today, AIATSIS continues to work with the families of the creators to develop the story of the shield.

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Purpose

The purpose of the *AIATSIS Guide to evaluating and selecting education resources* (the Guide) is to assist educators to critically self-reflect on their positionality and support them to work from a foundation of integrity. In doing so, teachers can ensure curriculum resources selected for teaching do not cause harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but rather foster trust and build a sense of pride for all.

Educators must make conscious and critical decisions when selecting curriculum resources to ensure they reflect all children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Guide will support teachers to select appropriate resources for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages respectfully and effectively.

The Guide has been developed using:

- The AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020)
- The *Spiral of Inquiry* (Kaser & Halbert, 2013; 2017)
- *Resource Guide for Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies* (National Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies Project, 1995)
- *Selecting and Evaluating Resources* (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007)
- *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018)
- *Evaluating Texts* (Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation, n.d.)

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures* cross-curriculum priority provides an opportunity for all young Australians to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, knowledge traditions, and holistic world views (ACARA, 2015). Although the Australian Curriculum sets the expectations for teaching all young Australians, many teachers still believe that the cross-curriculum priority does not apply if they do not have Indigenous students in their classrooms. Dr Kaye Price (2019, p. 2) addresses this misconception by reiterating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is both **for and about** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

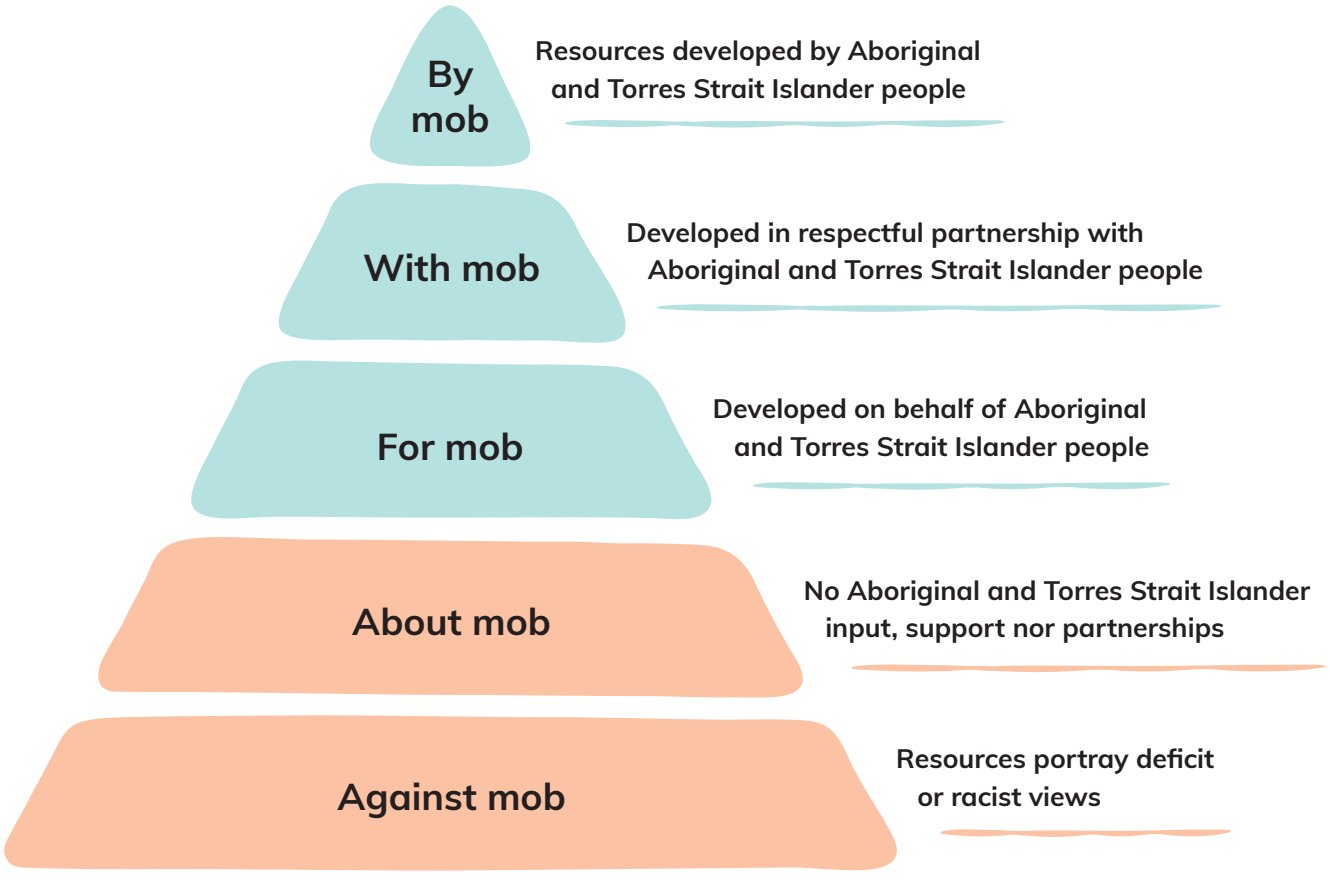
The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Professional Standard for Teachers 2.4 clearly outlines the responsibility of all Australian teachers when educating about Indigenous-related content. Teachers should:

- understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- provide opportunities for students to develop an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages.

Teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives requires educators to carefully select curriculum resources. In practice this could include: selecting suitable resources to incorporate into lessons; organising classroom visits from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists/authors; promoting the work of organisations that provide knowledge about the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to name a few.

Selecting culturally-appropriate curriculum resources is one of the many ways teachers can actively work to reduce the harm imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities by education systems. Appropriate resources also ensure racist views are not taught to students. Historically, the use of books, audio-visual material, and other resources that promoted racist ideas, uninformed positions, and/or stereotypical understandings have been an issue in Australian classrooms (Craven & Price, 2011). To contribute to redressing this historically-rooted but ongoing problem (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011), teachers should begin with a foundational knowledge of integrity, and the ongoing application of critical self-reflection.

The pyramid below introduces some of the foundational, integrity-based considerations teachers should make when assessing the cultural appropriateness and educational quality of curriculum resources. It demonstrates that educators should understand the evaluation of resources as a spectrum between more and less appropriate. With a focus on valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authorship, perspectives, and partnerships, the pyramid highlights how teachers can avoid uncritically using racist and culturally-inappropriate content in their classrooms.

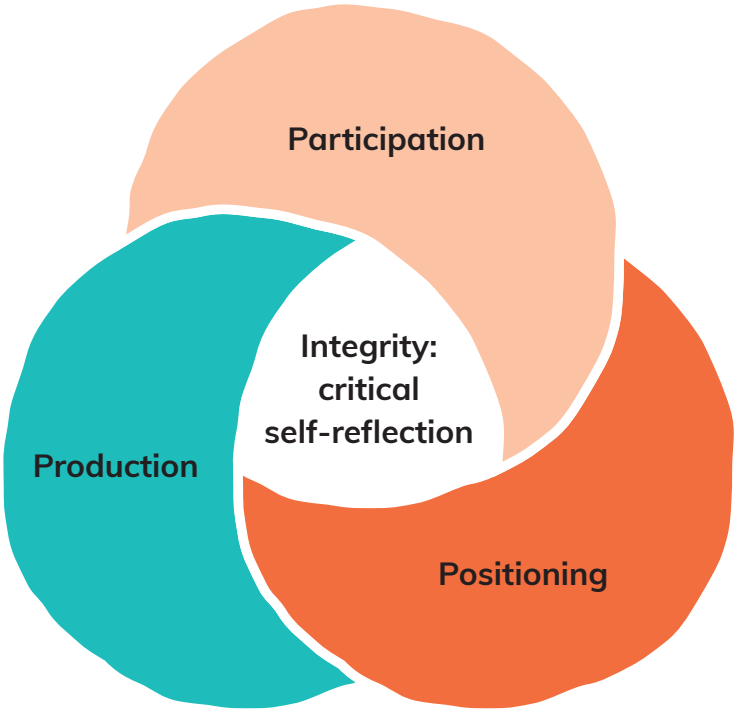


Top: Josie from Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Torres Strait, one of the young authors of *Our Land, Our Stories*. Bottom: Students viewing the AIATSIS foyer display. Photos: AIATSIS

Resource Evaluation Framework

The AIATSIS Resource Evaluation Framework provides educators with a critical reflection tool to assist them in selecting quality curriculum resources for and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The AIATSIS Resource Evaluation Framework



Participation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the development of content.

Positioning

How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people positioned throughout the resource?

Production

Creating and developing education resources.

The Resource Evaluation Framework has been developed from the *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research* (2020), drawing on its discussion of responsibilities associated with an integrity mindset. This includes prioritising Indigenous self-determination and leadership as well as ensuring ongoing assessment of impact and risk when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and knowledges. It also embraces key elements of Kaser and Halbert's *Spiral of Inquiry* (2013, 2017), which is a systematic process for investigating and improving academic, social, and wellbeing outcomes and is built on evidence-based concepts educators already know and practices they may already use.

> 'The *Spiral of Inquiry* is about listening to learners and reflecting on our own practices as educators'
>
> – Kaser & Halbert 2017

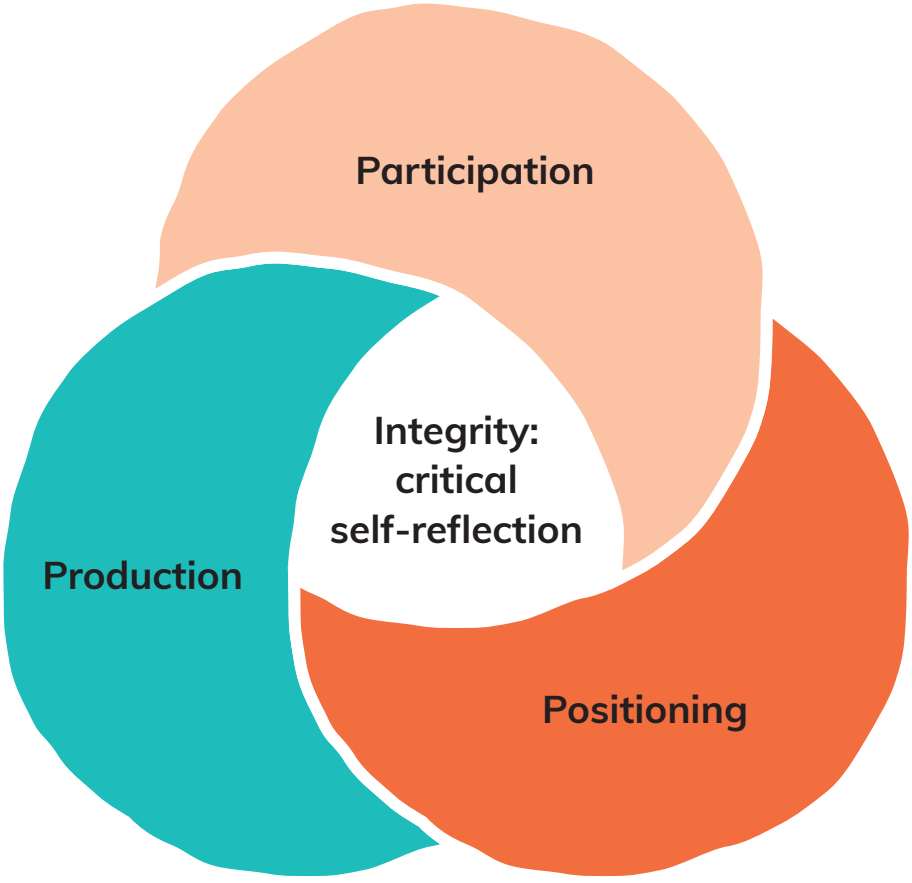
By combining elements of the *Spiral of Inquiry* with the *AIATSIS Code of Ethics*, the Guide has the potential to challenge the invisible assumptions that keep ineffective and sometimes harmful practices going, despite professional learning, the reading of books, and the provision of resources to teachers. It can empower teachers to undertake active, ongoing evaluation to ensure that their choices about resources are guided by conscious and deliberate decision-making.

Foundation of integrity: critical self-reflection

Integrity, as the central idea of the Resource Evaluation Framework, is a multifaceted concept. At the most basic level, integrity is what guides how we make decisions. The decisions we then choose to make with an integrity mindset can foster trust. In relation to Indigenous education, integrity involves acting in the right spirit, with respect for Country, and upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as self-determining communities, and rights holders, whose knowledge and contributions must be recognised, respected, and valued (AIATSIS, 2020, p. 11).

Integrity is also foundational to critical self-reflection, where educators engage in a process of analysing and making judgments about their own experiences and related biases – a process that includes observing, asking questions, and putting facts, ideas, and experiences together to derive new meaning and self-understanding. Critical self-reflection is a vehicle for moral deliberation, critical analysis, problem-solving, synthesis of opposing ideas, evaluation, identifying patterns, and creating meaning (Bart, 2011; Frolic & Rubin, 2018).

Using the foci of **integrity** and **critical self-reflection**, the Resource Evaluation Framework wraps together three interlinked evaluation criteria: **participation, positioning,** and **production:**



Critical self-reflection requires educators, especially non-Indigenous teaching professionals, to consider their pedagogical practice and where they stand in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related curriculum content that they teach, to ask themselves the following questions:

- What life experiences, early education, social media influences, television, books, or attitudes shape my choice of curriculum resources and the way I teach it?
- How do my own histories and biases influence how I approach curriculum resource consideration and the language I use?
- Where do I stand in relation to this resource and the ideas explored in it?

As human beings, we all have blind spots and implicit biases. Educators must acknowledge the influences on their behaviours and thoughts, and therefore their pedagogical practice (Rose, 2019). Cultural competency training cannot do this alone because, as Professor Martin Nakata (1995, p. 50) asserts, '[r]elevance or sensitivity to "cultural differences" alone does not change dominant practices from alienating [Indigenous peoples and knowledges]. Changes to dominant practices, however, change dominant practices'. It is as important to critically self-reflect on implicit bias and the assumptions educators bring to the classroom as it is to recognise the biases and assumptions perpetuated through the wider education structures and systems in which educators work daily (Buckskin, 2019). In doing so, teachers can ensure they are taking action to reduce the harm that can be unintentionally inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a result of teaching and learning.

Journaling, engaging a community of practice, or participating in professional learning are common ways that educators can critically self-reflect. Journaling can also strengthen a teacher's foundation of integrity to confidently select Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related curriculum resources that will enhance student learning experiences, rather than inflict racial harm (Davis, 2016; McDowall, 2018).

Deb Stiles teaching her daughter about Country using the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia. Photo: AIATSIS

Teachers can begin by asking themselves the following critical questions. Regularly revisiting and reflecting upon these questions will support ongoing professional growth.

Reflecting on self

- What is my racial and cultural heritage? **How do I know? Why does it matter?**
- In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I experience the world? **How do I know? Why does it matter?**
- In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence what I emphasise in my teaching? **How do I know? Why does it matter?**
- In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences? **How do I know? Why does it matter?**

Reflecting on self in relation to students

- What are the cultural and racial heritages of my students? **How do I know? What am I going to do with this information?**
- In what ways do my students' racial and cultural backgrounds influence how they experience the world? **How do I know? What am I going to do with this information?**

Shifting from self to system

- What is the contextual nature of race, racism, and culture in my classroom, my school, and the broader community? **How do I know? What am I going to do about it?**
- What systemic and organisational barriers and structures shape peoples' experiences in school, and in the broader community? **How do I know? What am I going to do about it?**

***Our Land, Our Stories* contributors Josie, Orlando and Shae at the launch of the landmark education series. Photo: AIATSIS**

Core questions when evaluating resources

With the foundation of critical self-reflection, teachers have the tools to make integrity-driven decisions in the selection of culturally-appropriate curriculum resources. The Resource Evaluation Framework then provides the scaffolding – via the focus on participation, positioning, and production – to further guide teachers in their evaluation process. Teachers can use the following evaluative questions to inform their thinking.

Participation: Indigenous participation in the development of content.

- Is the author an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person?
- If not, who wrote the resource and what is their relationship to the subject?
- Does the resource acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participation?
- Has the material been endorsed by local, regional, state or territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups or other Indigenous-governed groups?
- Is the material acceptable to the people that it is written about?

Positioning: how are Indigenous people positioned throughout the resource?

- Does it mainly use past tense when talking about Indigenous people?
- Is the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies acknowledged?
- Is the information generic and does it homogenise Indigenous peoples?
- Are stereotyping and racist connotations present?
- Does the resource share sacred and/or secret aspects of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures?
- Does the material use terminology that will likely offend Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people?
- Does the resource trivialise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander technologies?
- Is the content accurate, truthful, and free from error?
- Are images of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people accurate and positive portrayals?
- Do photographs identify specific Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people or groups related to the image?
- Are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people presented in images naked and/or relegated to the past?
- Does it provide context for what changed between past and present, for Indigenous peoples, regarding invasion and colonisation, dispossession and discrimination, exclusion and assimilation?

Production: making your own curriculum resources

If producing your own resources, you should answer 'yes' to all production core questions.

- Have you sought advice and guidance from traditional custodians and knowledge holders about the Country and/or story that you are creating a resource for?
- Do you have the appropriate warnings in place?
- Does your resource incorporate and attribute Indigenous knowledges to their rightful owners?
- Are you using reputable sources to inform your curriculum resource?
- Have you paid Indigenous people for their time and knowledge in contributing to your resource development?
- Have you considered Indigenous peoples' rights to maintain, control, protect and develop heritage and knowledge, including stories and photographs?
- Have you consulted with Indigenous groups or contributors to co-design a curriculum resource that is culturally-appropriate, useful, and informative?

It is unlikely that any individual resource will align with all the core questions; this is not intended as a definitive checklist but rather should be understood as a tool to support integrity-driven decision-making. By asking core questions **plus** engaging in critical self-reflection, teachers will be empowered to improve their own practice and better select quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related curriculum resources.

By applying this Guide, educators can consider a variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related stories and perspectives to provide students with a holistic range of text types, topics, and authors that tell the story of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. This will then create opportunities for children and young people to encounter, engage with and be transformed by this story.

Warlpiri artist Tess Napaljarri Ross with granddaughter Bethalia Kelly in Yuendumu, NT. Photo: AIATSIS

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