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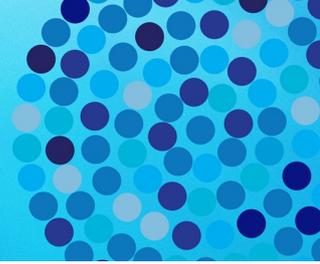
Engaging with Australian South Sea Islander students, families and communities

A framework for educators and other professionals

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For a presentation by Francis Bobongie-Harris on Engaging with Australian South Sea Islander students, families and communities, visit The Centre for Inclusive Education website <https://research.qut.edu.au/c4ie/>

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We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and seas where our Australian South Sea Islander ancestors were brought to, and where their descendants now live. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise their connection to Country and place, and their role in caring for their people for thousands of years.

Warning.

Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people are warned that this guide may contain names and images of deceased people.



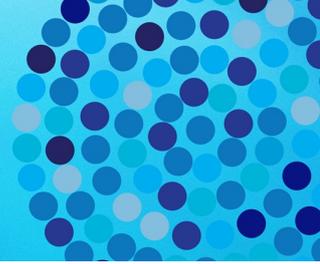
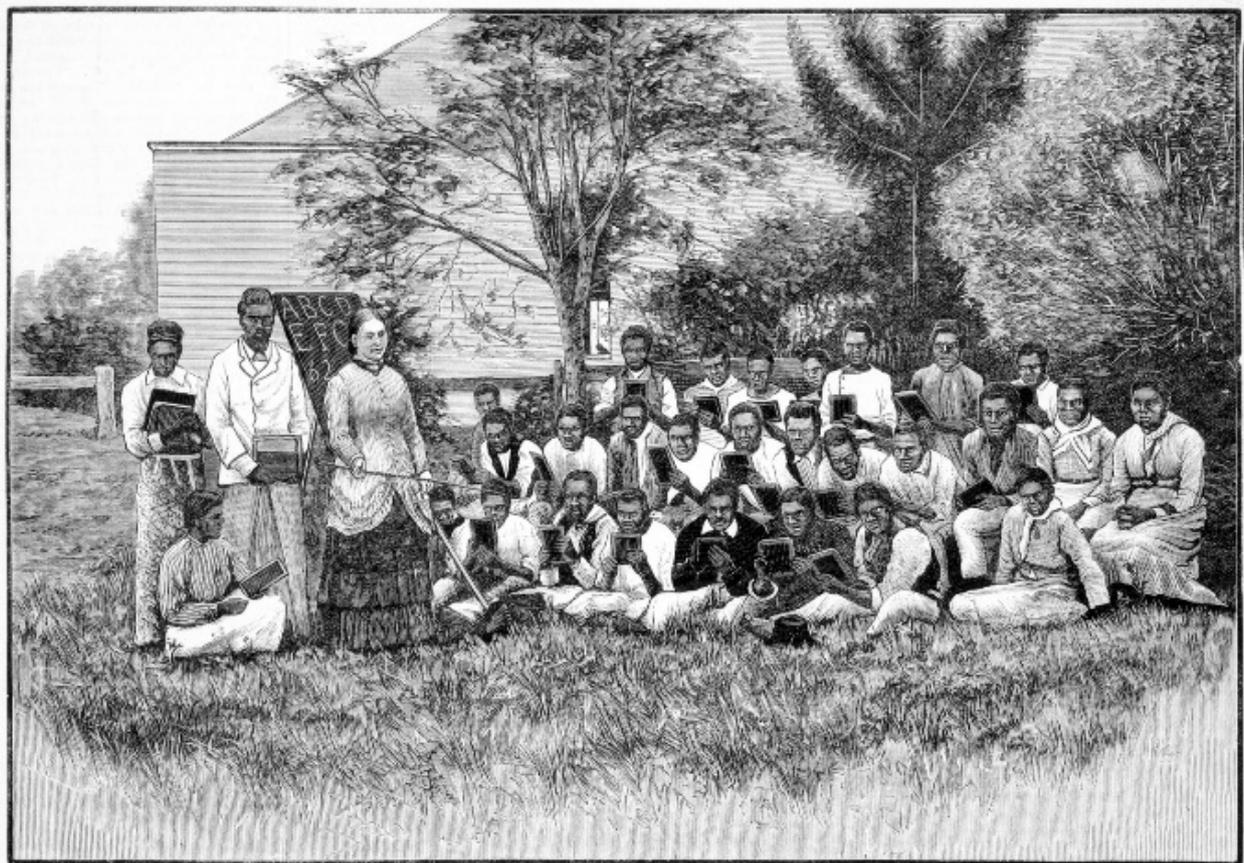
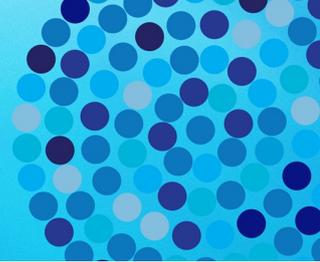


Table of contents

About this guide.....	3
Who are Australian South Sea Islanders?	3
Purpose	4
Engagement Strategies	5
Eldership: the respectful intergenerational sharing of Australian South Sea Islander Knowledges.....	6
Practice Tips	6
Connection: to place and community through history and culture	7
Practice Tips.....	7
Relationships: developing and maintaining relationships with students, families and communities.....	8
Practice Tips.....	8
Practice: demonstrates culturally responsive teaching practices	8
Practice Tips.....	8
References	9



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About this guide

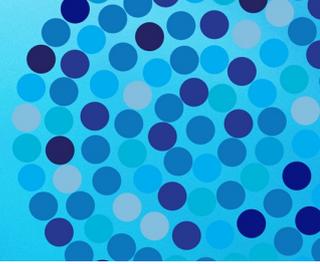
This guide is to provide engagement strategies to improve understanding and increase awareness for educators of Australian South Sea Islander students and their families. It will provide guidance to support greater engagement between teachers and educators, and Australian South Sea Islander communities.

Who are Australian South Sea Islanders?

Australian South Sea Islanders comprise a distinct cultural community that is not Indigenous to Australia^[1]. They are the Australian-born descendants of Melanesian people brought to Queensland between 1863 and 1904 to work in Queensland's primary industries. Perceived as having a

strong work ethic, Australian South Sea Islander "men, women and children were forced to work long hours of exhausting manual labour for low or no wages while living in very poor conditions"^[2, p.1]. A resilient people, South Sea Islanders protested, petitioning the Government against deportation under the White Australia Policy. Today, the descendants of those who remain in Australia are collectively known as Australian South Sea Islanders^[2].

The generation of Australian South Sea Islanders who remained after deportation were subjected to ongoing racial discrimination and harsh treatment, including restrictions because of government legislation. Australian South Sea Islander children were permitted to attend school from the 1890s but only for a limited number of years.



As a result, some people affected by these policies and who are now parents and grandparents of school age children do not place a high value on formal education^[3]. As well, few educators are equipped to successfully engage these families, placing Australian South Sea Islander students at an educational disadvantage.

Purpose

Their access to education continued to be limited until 1940, and various attempts were made to segregate Australian South Sea Islander children from several schools.

One of the goals of the Alice Springs [Mparntwe] Education Declaration^[4], is to support every young Australian at risk of educational disadvantage. However, very little research has been undertaken to understand the level of disadvantage experienced by Australian South Sea Islander students.

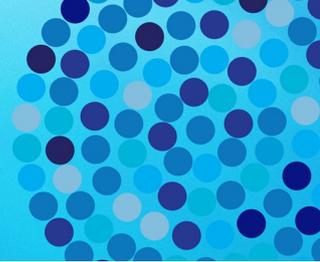
A twenty-year-old study conducted by Steve Mullins et al^[5], found that “Australian South Sea Islanders (at that time) regarded education as the principal means by which their communities can overcome disadvantage”. The study emphasised the significance of the role of family in securing an education and identified ways in which educators could improve retention rates by working closely with families.

These include:

1. Discussing opportunities and constraints in a student's schooling within individual families
2. Encouraging parents and community to actively participate in children's education
3. Providing of incentives to continue education
4. Devising programs that assist students and families make informed choices about education
5. Support and encouraging individual academic success
6. Ensuring that educators are well versed in Australian South Sea Islander history and culture
7. Ensuring that educators understand issues and challenges faced by Australian South Sea Islanders.

While some resourcing for children in 'Black communities' in Queensland is available, currently there are no educational resources specific to the cultural needs of Australian South Sea Islanders. The purpose of the model is to provide engagement strategies to improve understanding and increase awareness for educators of Australian South Sea Islander students and their families. It will provide guidance to support greater engagement between teachers and educators, and Australian South Sea Islander communities.



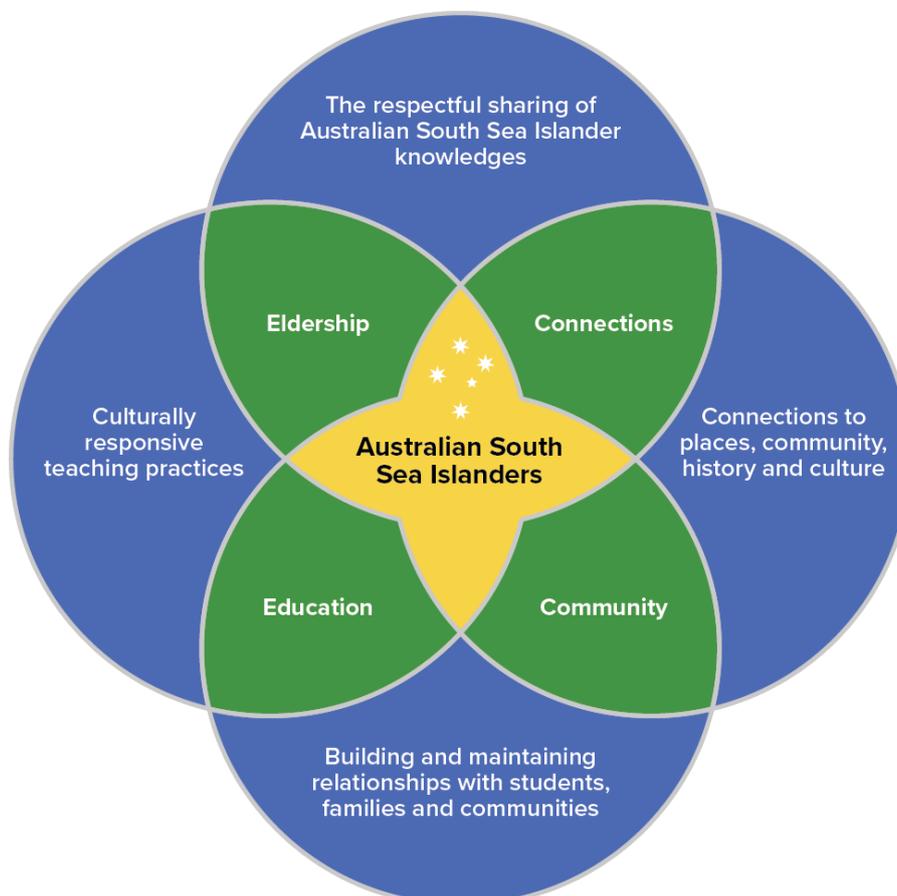


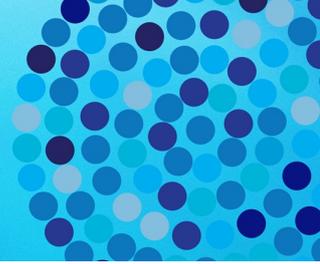
Engagement Strategies

To successfully engage with Australian South Sea Islander students, families, and communities, it is essential to respect the sharing of Australian South Sea Islander knowledges and the culturally specific way these are shared. Australian South Sea Islander Elders are the holders of knowledge of their connection to place, community, history, and culture. When such knowledge is respectfully applied, educators can approach teaching using students' cultural knowledge to facilitate the teaching and learning process^[6, p. 106]. To do this effectively, it is important that relationships with students, families, and communities are built on trust. To maintain those relationships, it is critical that educators consistently show a respect for these knowledges and understand Australian South Sea Islander needs from an Australian South Sea Islander perspective.

The following four interconnected strategies of engagement are based on culturally specific principles that operate within traditional Australian South Sea Islander communities. They include:

1. Eldership: the respectful intergenerational sharing of Australian South Sea Islander Knowledges
2. Connection: to place and community through history and culture
3. Relationships: developing and maintaining relationships with students, families, and communities
4. Education: demonstrates culturally responsive teaching practices.





Eldership: the respectful intergenerational sharing of Australian South Sea Islander Knowledges

Elders are generally community members known for their deep knowledge of, and advice and guidance about culture, history and knowledge; they are also respected because of broader connections to the ancestral lands of the Pacific.

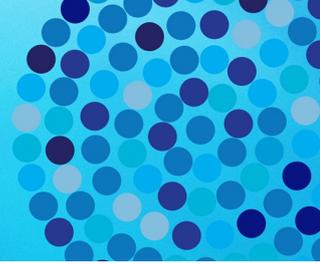
The role of Elder within Australian South Sea Islander communities is viewed with an elevated level of respect.

Practice Tips

There are immense benefits to educators inviting Elders or Australian South Sea Islander parents into classrooms to share their cultural knowledge, skills, and experiences.

- This enables educators to see the Elders' view on 'educating' in practice as they share their knowledge
- It shows students that the school values their families' knowledge and experiences
- The inclusion of community, and most importantly Elders, aligns with Australian South Sea Islander protocols of living and working as a collective community, bringing the traditional into contemporary practice
- Elders who see that they and their perspectives, and their traditional ways of educating are respected are more willing to share their knowledge and stories
- Inviting Elders into classes to share their knowledge and/lead class excursions to sites significant to Australian South Sea Islanders allows students to view Elders as role models and enhance their own connection to place and knowledge.





Connection: to place and community through history and culture

Australian South Sea Islanders connection to place is located both where they or their ancestors came from across the Pacific and where they or their families were brought to in Australia. It is common for Australian South Sea Islander students to have strong connections and ties to multiple places.

Placing value on Australian South Sea Islander knowledge, history and culture and their knowledge systems by various means within the classroom would enable Australian South Sea Islander students to connect more deeply to their own identity, increase a sense of pride and provide them with the motivation to learn^[6].

Australian South Sea Islander people are not Indigenous to Australia

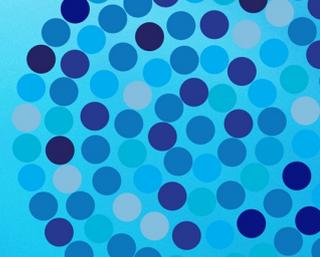
Practice Tips

In the classroom, educators can increase the content material about the Australian South Sea Islander connection to place, people, history, and culture.

It is important to do so by including, if not preferencing the perspectives of the Australian South Sea Islander community in which they live, avoiding sharing this content solely or primarily from a non-Australian South Sea Islander point of view.

To manage this content respectfully and in a culturally appropriate way, it is possible to seek advice from a qualified person within the Australian South Sea Islander community. This may be an Australian South Sea Islander Elder or family within a school community that the educators have already built a relationship with. Alternatively, QUASSIC Inc. (Queensland United Australian South Sea Islander Council Inc) is able to connect educators with a member of the local Australian South Sea Islander organisation within different communities.





Relationships: developing and maintaining relationships with students, families and communities

Relationships are important and are central to teaching and learning^[7]. A starting point for educators seeking to build relationships with Australian South Sea Islander communities is to gain an awareness of their unique culture and ethnicity and how it is infused in the local area^[8].

Interacting with Elders and community strengthens connections between school and community while also giving educators the opportunity to develop new skills in communicating with Australian South Sea Islanders and gaining an awareness of the community's perspective on the education of Australian South Sea Islanders^[9]. It is important that these interactions are carried out in a way that aligns with principles held dear within the Australian South Sea Islander community.

Practice Tips

When contacting any member of the community, an educator will be expected to act in a trustworthy and honest way.

The sharing of knowledge is based on authentic relationships, and it may be requested of an educator that they meet a second or third time to clarify what is being said, or that a person might bring other family or community members into the meeting for support.

Culturally responsive teaching is using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively^[10].

Practice: demonstrates culturally responsive teaching practices

Culturally responsive teaching should reflect and validate educational experiences that promote student culture and language. This should be reflected and encouraged from leadership and the management and operation of the school but also in the curriculum and the pedagogies used^[11]. There is importance in the engagement and the experiences built through relationships with people and place^[6].

Celebrating cultural diversity and cultural immersion has a positive impact on building relationships and cross-cultural understanding between students and staff and enhances relationships with community

Practice Tips

There are numerous ways in which educators can demonstrate culturally responsive teaching practices for Australian South Sea Islander students.

Educators might consider their current teaching practices in response to the Australian South Sea Islander knowledges shared by Elders and community and make adaptations to be responsive to the specific cultural needs^[1].

Educators would do well to consider the cultural experiences and perspectives of these ethnically diverse students and devise ways of using these as a means for teaching these students more effectively^[8].

Educators might gain an understanding of the communication styles (e.g., storytelling, yarning and respectful listening) specific to Australian South Sea Islander peoples and draw on this to inform the amount of time and space they allow for students to absorb and respond to the lesson content^[9].

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