

Affiliated Schools Research Program Final Report

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Action Research

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Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Action Research

Using action research and culturally responsive pedagogy to enhance teacher professionalism

Background and Purpose

While Australian schools are characterised by rich cultural diversity that offers significant educational opportunities, recent research reveals that graduate teachers report feeling unprepared for the increasing diversity of Australian's classrooms.

This project implemented and assessed the effectiveness of professional learning and mentoring support based on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP). Ten ACT primary teachers with an interest in pedagogical responses to diversity engaged with the theory and practice of CRP. Utilising action research methodology, this approach positioned teachers as knowledge creators, encouraging critical reflection and critical engagement with practice.

While the project aimed to build evidence for a new approach to CRP in ACT schools that drew on the newly developed Australian Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework, project researchers found the approaches inherent to CRP also had a significant implications for professional learning.

Project Process

Teacher participants engaged in six professional learning workshops over three school terms. Workshops focused on CRP and included mentoring and coaching for participating teachers. Participants were provided with literature and theory and given the opportunity to explore these with fellow participants and the research team with the aim of addressing a pedagogical challenge in their classrooms.

All participating teachers created and delivered a unit of work for their class, embracing CRP based on the lifeworlds

Project title: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Action Research

Project affiliations: Center for Sustainable Communities and ACT Affiliated Schools Program

Project time frame: August 2023 - June 2025

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of the students in their class. Student engagement and learning was observed and recorded by the participating teachers.

The qualitative analysis of the project occurred in tandem with the implementation of the program in schools and post implementation. This used a blend of ethnographic and action research tools including: participant observation in workshops, mentoring and coaching, and semi-structured interviews with participating teachers. Thematic and narrative analysis were used to analyse the qualitative data.

What teachers had to say

“I am so happy I was involved in the project [because] this isn't something done to you, this is something that you looking into your own pedagogy and how you're doing things.”

“[this process] has made me feel more connected to other teachers and I feel I've been able to share my knowledge and learn from them.”

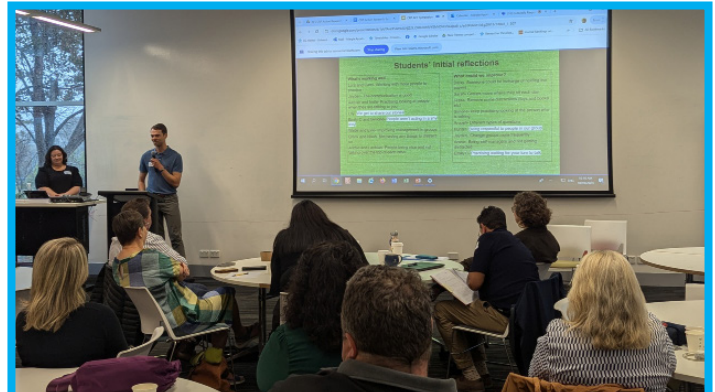
“I felt a bit stagnant... but [after this] I was like, okay, so I can still feel challenged and pushed—motivated.”

“using the opportunity to step back and reflect... Reflect on my own practice, on my context and put the children at the centre of what we do.”

“I think in forty years of teaching, that’s probably the most valuable PL I’ve ever had.”

Findings

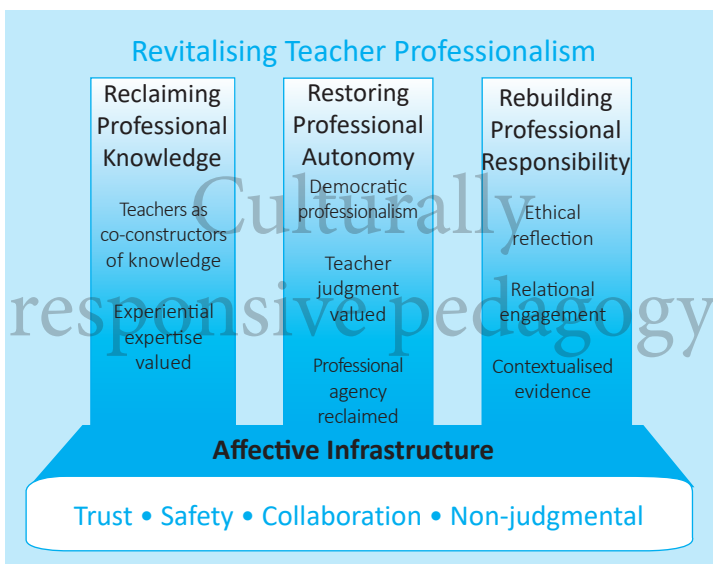
- Teacher professionalism was revitalised by reclaimed roles as knowledgeable, autonomous, and responsible professionals.
- The professional community provided critical support through collegial dialogue and shared experience.
- Pedagogical transformations were characterised by more authentic engagement with student lifeworlds, more responsive approaches to diversity, and navigation of tensions between performativity demands and authentic practice.
- CRP is not merely a theoretical framework but a practical approach that can enhance student experiences and outcomes when implemented through thoughtful action research.



Participants Sara Meins and Hayden Styman present their work at the CRP Symposium to colleagues, ACT Directorate representatives and university researchers from University of Canberra, University of South Australia, and University of Adelaide.

A Model for Professional Learning

Beyond individual outcomes, the project modeled an approach to professional learning that supports both student success and teacher wellbeing. This project offers a model for culturally responsive, teacher-led professional learning that holds implications for systems seeking to uphold learning excellence while empowering and supporting educators.



Reclaiming Professional Knowledge

Teachers were repositioned as co-constructors of knowledge. When experiential expertise was valued, teachers found increased confidence in the professional knowledge.

Restoring Professional Autonomy

Participation in the project empowered teachers to make pedagogical choices aligned with their students’ needs and fostered a renewed sense of professional agency.

Rebuilding Professional Responsibility

Ethical and relational dimensions of teaching were re-centered. The project re-established dialogic professional spaces that support reflective and purposeful practice.

Learn more about
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy at
culturallyresponsivepedagogy.com.au

Part 2. Executive Summary

Project Background and Context

The Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) Action Research Project was initiated in response to the growing cultural diversity within Australian classrooms and the associated challenges faced by educators. Recent research has highlighted that many graduate teachers feel underprepared to effectively respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students.

This project, conducted from August 2023 to June 2025 across eight ACT primary schools, sought to address this gap by supporting teachers in developing and enacting culturally responsive pedagogical practices through a sustained program of professional learning and participatory action research.

Project Aims and Approach

This project aimed to address the critical gap in Australian education where teachers report feeling unprepared for increasingly diverse classrooms. Through implementing and assessing professional learning in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), the project sought to build evidence for new approaches to cultural responsiveness in ACT schools, create sustainable collaborative communities across schools, and explore transformative impacts on teachers and students. The research employed a collaborative participatory action research methodology involving ten primary teachers from eight ACT primary schools who engaged with CRP theory and practice through six professional learning workshops over three terms, identifying pedagogical challenges, redesigning units of work, and reflecting on implementation through systematic data collection and analysis.

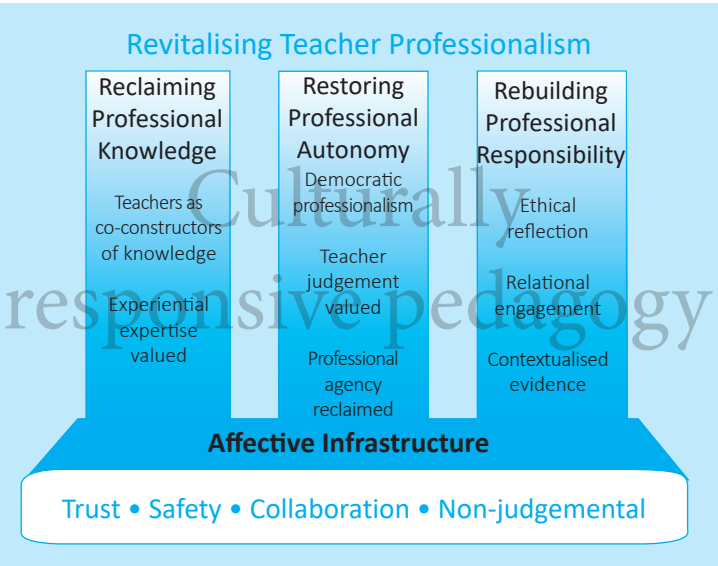
Methodology

A participatory action research methodology underpinned the project. Data collection included participant observation during workshops, semi-structured interviews, mentoring documentation, and teacher-generated classroom data. The project emphasised "affective infrastructure"—the cultivation of emotionally supportive, intellectually engaging spaces where teachers could critically reflect on their practice and pedagogical beliefs. The workshops fostered dialogic learning, collegiality, and professional trust, creating conditions for authentic and contextually grounded professional growth.

Key Findings

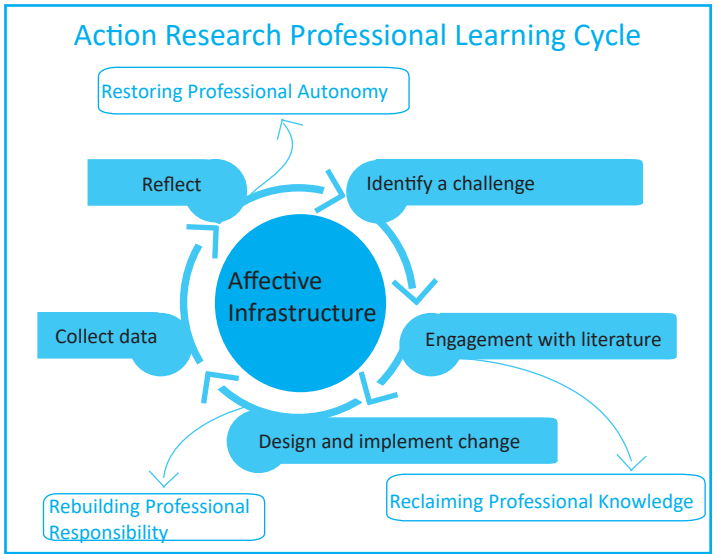
Revitalising Teacher Professionalism

The project led to a marked renewal of teacher identity and professional purpose. Participants reported a strengthened sense of agency, enhanced motivation, and a reconnection with the ethical dimensions of teaching. The collaborative nature of the program allowed teachers to challenge compliance-based models of professional learning, reclaiming autonomy in pedagogical decision-making and positioning themselves as knowledgeable practitioners and researchers.



Transformation of Pedagogical Practice

Teachers implemented CRP strategies that authentically engaged with student lifeworlds, moving beyond superficial or performative approaches to diversity. Classroom interventions demonstrated increased relevance to students' cultural contexts, which in turn improved engagement and student experience. Teachers reported greater responsiveness to student needs and more reflective, purposeful practice.



Development of Professional Learning Communities

The workshops functioned as emotionally safe and intellectually generative spaces that supported professional risk-taking and critical dialogue. Teachers described a strong sense of collegial connection and valued the opportunity to co-construct knowledge with peers that was absent from other professional practice and professional learning spaces. This professional community served as a key enabler of change.

blueprint for sustainable, equity-focused educational reform.

Enhanced Student Outcomes

The implementation of culturally responsive strategies led to notable improvements in student agency, social-emotional development, and relational dynamics in the classroom. Teachers observed reductions in disruptive behaviours, increased empathy among peers, and greater student ownership of learning. These findings reinforce the impact of CRP not only on academic achievement but also on holistic student wellbeing.

Outputs and Dissemination

The project generated a range of outputs, including case studies, impact video, academic articles, symposium a presentation with a panel of experts. It also facilitated policy engagement through a roundtable with the ACT Education Directorate. These activities contributed to broader dissemination and positioned the project as a model for professional learning that is both scalable and sustainable.

Implications and Recommendations

This project challenges prevailing models of professional development by foregrounding teacher agency, affective support, and contextual relevance. It provides a replicable framework for schools and systems seeking to foster inclusive and equitable teaching practices.

Recommendations include the integration of CRP into pre-service teacher education, the institutionalisation of teacher-led professional inquiry, and the cultivation of leadership practices that support teacher autonomy and collaboration.

Conclusion

The CRP Action Research Project illustrates the transformative potential of professional learning that is participatory, reflective, and emotionally sustaining. By centring teacher expertise and fostering collaborative professional communities, the project enabled both pedagogical innovation and enhanced student learning. As systems strive to respond to increasing diversity and support teacher retention, this model offers a compelling

Part 3. Detailed Report

Aims and Context

The rich cultural diversity in Australian schools offers us the opportunity to embrace the potential of working with diversity. However, in recent research, graduate teachers report that they are unprepared for the increasing cultural diversity of Australian's classrooms and a significant proportion of Australian teachers are not coping with the challenges of culturally diverse classrooms requiring professional learning support (Appel & Lee, 2023; Parkhouse et al., 2021) . While culturally responsive teaching has historically received limited attention in Australian educational contexts, this project has been directly inspired by the research and practice developed through University of South Australia's culturally responsive pedagogy initiatives. <https://culturallyresponsivepedagogy.com.au/> The ACT project builds upon these foundations, adapting and extending approaches that have demonstrated success in fostering more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

This project implemented and assessed the effectiveness of professional learning and mentoring support based on culturally responsive pedagogy. ACT primary teachers with an interest in pedagogical responses to diversity engaged with the theory and practice of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) through regular workshops over three school terms. Using an action research model, this project had teachers identify a pedagogical challenge in their classrooms, redesign a unit of work to address that challenge and enact the redesigned unit, collecting and reflecting on relevant data throughout the process.

Specifically, this project aimed to:

1. Build evidence for a new approach to culturally responsive pedagogy in ACT schools that draws on the newly developed Australian Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework.
2. Build and sustain a collaborative community across a cluster of schools to produce new professional and scholarly knowledge about culturally responsive pedagogical practice in the ACT.
3. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers and mentoring through an extended program of professional learning, pedagogy development, action research.
4. Explore how the program creates transformative impacts for participating teachers, and students.

Research Question

In what ways do teachers, students, and school communities respond to and co-construct meaning from professional learning on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy action research?

Approach and Methods

This project adopted a collaborative participatory action research approach which combined engagement with teacher participants and co-researchers in developing units of learning based on CRP and qualitative assessment of the pedagogies developed through the process. Collaborative and participatory action research is increasingly shaping educational practices both globally and in Australia, playing a key role in enhancing teacher skills and fostering professional development within local context (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2012; Kemmis et al., 2013). Such methodologies enable the systematic examination of the re-designing of pedagogic practice by teachers.

The application of CRP with teachers as participants and co-researchers was contextualised through six professional learning workshops over three school terms. Workshops focused on CRP and action research and included mentoring and coaching for participating teachers. Participants were provided with literature and theory and given the opportunity to explore these with fellow participants and the research team with the aim of addressing a pedagogical challenge in their classrooms. All participating teachers created and delivered a unit of work for their class, embracing CRP based on the lifeworlds of the students in their class. Student engagement and learning was observed and recorded by the participating teachers

Methodology

The project employed qualitative research methods to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and the impacts on student learning, with particular attention to the affective dimensions of classroom environments. Data gathering occurred both during program implementation and after completion, utilising a complementary blend of ethnographic and action research approaches.

Data collection methods included participant observation during workshops, documentation of mentoring and coaching interactions, and semi-structured interviews with participating teachers. All interviews and some group discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy. The research team employed both thematic and narrative analytical approaches to interpret the qualitative data, allowing for identification of key patterns while preserving the richness of individual teacher experiences.

Project Timeline (more details in Appendix B)

	Orientation	Professional Development	Action Research Implementation	Analysis and Presentation	Output Production
	October-December 2023	February-April 2024	April-September 2024	September-November 2024	January-June 2025
ACTIVITY	- Recruitment of teachers - Meetings with Uni SA CRP team and Canberra schools to develop the theoretical and practical contents of the professional learning to meet the needs of the ACT primary school context. - Development of professional learning materials. - Project administration: ethics approval and appointment of research assistant	- Two professional development workshops (1 full day plus 1 half day) for participants on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and action research - Baseline teacher interviews. - Mentoring sessions - Guided curriculum development of unit of work designed by participating teachers	Two workshops: sharing and mentoring, implementation of new curriculum, ongoing monitoring and mentor support, teacher interviews, student assessment outcomes	1 half day workshop - Full day Symposium with expert panel and teacher presentations of action research projects	Analysis of final results and production of key outputs
METHODS	Discussions with UniSA collaborators and classroom teachers	- Baseline survey - Recording of group discussions - Observation of mentoring & curriculum development process (Field notes) - Redesigned curricula materials	- Teachers gather data of choice for action research; reflective journals - Workshop discussions recorded - Researcher reflections journaled	- Final discussion recording - Teacher presentations at symposium - Teacher semi structured interviews	- Thematic and narrative data analysis - Article submissions - Video production

Key Findings

In what ways do teachers, students, and school communities respond to and co-construct meaning from professional learning on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy action research?

Key Finding 1: Revitalising Teacher professionalism

This project has had a significant impact on the professional lives of participating teachers by creating space for critical reflection, collaborative inquiry, and ethical engagement. Through the CRP workshops and sustained peer learning, teachers reconnected with the core values of their practice and reclaimed their roles as knowledgeable, autonomous, and responsible professionals. Through analysis of group discussion and individual interviews, researchers found the affective and intellectual infrastructure of the project supported deep shifts in how teachers understood their work, not only improving classroom practice but also revitalising their professional identities and purpose. As one teacher articulated, *"I think in forty years of teaching,*

that's probably the most valuable PL I've ever had". The project provided a space for teachers to rediscover their passion for teaching through meaningful engagement with culturally responsive pedagogy. Key findings reveal how the project contributed to reclaiming professional knowledge and restoring autonomy while rebuilding a shared sense of responsibility.

Reclaiming Professional Knowledge

The project contributed meaningfully to the reclaiming of professional knowledge infrastructures by repositioning teachers as experts and co-constructors of pedagogical knowledge. The collaborative design of the professional learning process enabled participants to engage with theory and practice dialogically, valuing their experiential knowledge and creating space for situated inquiry.

This was in stark contrast to traditional professional learning models often perceived as disconnected from classroom realities. As one teacher noted, *"A lot of the PL is determined by your leadership... not necessarily coming*

from what problems are you actually facing on the floor." Another reflected on the underutilisation of in-school expertise: *"It's not playing to the strengths that people have in our industry... I could run this."*

Through ongoing collaborative workshops, teachers experienced a revaluation of their professional knowledge. The cyclical nature of the project—engaging with new ideas, implementing them, and reflecting collaboratively with peers, was described by one participant as, *"The way that they were spaced out across the year was very helpful because there was a bit of theory, but then also being able to go back into our context and be immersed and see where you could apply that theory. But then also come back to a professional learning workshop and reflect on what happened in the meantime."* This process enabled teachers to refine their practice while building a shared professional knowledge base, fostering both intellectual ownership and collective professional growth.

Restoring Professional Autonomy

The project also played a vital role in restoring professional autonomy. Teachers expressed that, through participation, they reconnected with the core values of their profession and felt increasingly empowered to make pedagogical decisions grounded in the needs of their students and communities.

Teachers reported a movement from compliance-oriented approaches toward greater professional autonomy and agency. This transformation reflected a shift from what Sachs (2001) calls "managerial professionalism" toward "democratic professionalism" that values teacher judgment and collaboration. As one teacher observed, *"It's not just I'm doing good teaching, and sometimes use the action research to assist with that... this experience is research, and that research that I'm doing feeds into my teaching practice."*

This shift was captured in one participant's reflection: *"It's the fight between what we're being told to do, and this is making an upheave for what we need, what children need."* The project challenged the top-down dynamics often associated with PL, creating affective and intellectual conditions for teachers to reclaim agency.

 *"I felt a bit stagnant... but [after this] I was like, okay, so I can still feel challenged and pushed—motivated."* Teachers also reported a reinvigorated motivation and professional confidence. *"I felt a bit stagnant... but [after this] I was like, okay, so I can still feel challenged and pushed—motivated."* Others described reclaiming a sense of capability: *"I felt like a real imposter... but then, as I was talking, and then afterwards, I was like, I've got this."*

These comments highlight the importance of affective infrastructure in cultivating autonomous professional judgment and confidence in practice.

Rebuilding Professional Responsibility

Finally, the project contributed to a rebuilding of professional responsibility by fostering ethical reflection and supporting deeper relational engagement with students. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on their pedagogical responsibilities beyond compliance, reconnecting with the moral and relational dimensions of their work. Development of action research techniques enabled them to rebuild their professional responsibility.

Teachers reconceptualised their understanding of research, moving beyond quantitative measures toward more contextualised and reflective approaches. *"The understanding of research versus action research and the data collection that was a huge hurdle for me because I didn't understand exactly what it was that I was doing. I had a preconceived understanding of what it was and it was a wrong concept"*. This shift enabled teachers to value different forms of evidence, including observation and reflection.

One teacher described this shift as a return to purpose: *"bringing the importance of that back and giving us time to kind of push towards paying attention to ourselves and our students and making that more important."* Another participant, reflecting on changes in the profession, noted the loss of space for meaningful collegial exchange: *"Back in the day our staff meetings... we talked about kids... we shared with each other. And it was great."* The project helped to re-establish these dialogic spaces, providing both the structure and the affective safety needed to explore complex issues of practice and responsibility.

The longing for authentic, dialogic professional spaces was echoed in one participant's suggestion: *"Imagine one meeting a term... we're just going to chat about all the things that we're challenged by and talk through solutions."* This sentiment, echoed by others in the group, demonstrates how the project functioned not only as a site of learning but as a mechanism for fostering collegiality and collaborative professional knowledge sharing. The approach trusted teachers to lead their own inquiry, taking their localised and specific classroom challenges seriously whilst providing dedicated time to work through these issues with competent colleagues.

Key Finding 2: Professional Learning Communities

The project demonstrated the powerful impact of creating supportive professional learning communities that foster collegial dialogue, cultural self-awareness, and collaborative inquiry. These communities provided vital spaces for teacher development that contrasted with the isolation many teachers typically experience in their professional lives. Findings described in Table 1.

Table 1. Cultivating Professional Learning Communities	
Emotional and Intellectual Support The professional learning community provided critical emotional and intellectual support through collegial dialogue and shared experience. As one teacher noted: <i>"It's been a very safe, accepting, non-judgmental group, which has been really good, because we don't always have that as teachers"</i>. This finding highlights the importance of relational spaces for teacher development, contrasting with the isolation many teachers typically experience.	Cultural Positioning A significant transformation occurred in teachers' understanding of their own cultural positioning. Many began the program with limited cultural self-awareness: <i>"I coming into it definitely didn't think I had any culture and I thought of myself as just a white Australian"</i>. Through the workshops, teachers developed a more nuanced understanding of culture that encompassed their own positions: <i>"I think that was quite profound and more profound than I thought it would be"</i>. This cultural self-awareness created a foundation for more authentic engagement with culturally responsive pedagogy, as teachers could better understand their own cultural lenses and biases.
Cyclical and Iterative Process The cyclical and iterative nature of the action research process, with opportunities for implementation, reflection, and refinement, was particularly valued by participants. As a teacher explained: <i>"Do something, learn about it, and have discussions, go away and implement stuff, come back, chat about it again, try something different, like it kept going... just kept refining and kept having the collaborative discussions in doing that"</i>.	Role of School Leadership The research highlighted the significant role of school leadership in either enabling or constraining the development of professional learning communities. Supportive leaders who valued teacher agency created conditions for successful implementation, while bureaucratic approaches limited possibilities. One teacher observed: <i>"A lot of the PL or whatever is determined by your leadership and what they think the needs; what they think needs addressing and not necessarily coming from what problems are you actually facing on the floor"</i>. This finding suggests that the development of professional learning communities requires leadership approaches that balance structure and agency, creating space for teacher-led inquiry while providing necessary resources and support.
Influencing School Cultures The impact of the professional learning community extended beyond individual classrooms to influence broader school cultures. Teachers reported how their work influenced colleagues and created momentum for change. One teacher shared, <i>"I have not mentioned this to you, but while you were interviewing people, I sent an e-mail to the leadership team because I really liked [participant]'s buddy programme... I sent an e-mail today saying - this is the discussion I would like to talk about integrating at our school for next year."</i>	

Key Finding 3: Transforming Pedagogical Practice Through Culturally Responsive Approaches

The action research process enabled significant transformations in teachers' pedagogical practices, as they developed and implemented culturally responsive approaches tailored to their specific contexts. These transformations were characterised by more authentic engagement with student lifeworlds, more responsive rather than reactive approaches to diversity, and navigation of tensions between performativity demands and authentic practice.

Authentic Engagement with Student Lifeworlds

Teachers developed strategies to incorporate students' lifeworlds into their pedagogy, moving beyond tokenistic approaches to more authentic engagement with student

identities and experiences. One teacher's "Walks on Country" project demonstrated how connecting learning to place fostered deeper engagement: *"When returning to school, I began to see children stop and change course when they were about to run through the garden. I hear children reminding their peers of our pillar of 'Love' and the expectations 'Care for environment' more regularly, showing collective responsibility"*.

Another teacher's work on addressing casual racism demonstrated a shift toward more responsive approaches: *"Students became much more self-aware, often catching themselves in the middle of making a joke and stopping before it went too far."*

Navigating Tensions

Teachers navigated complex tensions between external performance expectations and the authentic implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. As a teacher observed, *"School is just political, like we're doing things for other people's agendas sometimes."* This finding connects to broader issues of performativity in Australian education (Appel, 2020). The research also illuminated real challenges in implementing action research in school

contexts, including time constraints, competing priorities, and systemic pressures. A teacher reflected, *"I have two classes for 1.5 hours each once a week. And that's if we don't have Athletics Carnival... I don't have the effect and change that I would if I were a normal classroom teacher."*

Sustaining and Scaling

Teachers identified strategies for sustaining and scaling culturally responsive pedagogy beyond individual classrooms and beyond the timeframe of the project. One teacher commented, *"In my school setting it's not going to be something that can be this is what the whole school's doing like, we're all trialling it. I don't think that would be successful, I think. It has to start from stuff happening around the school, little pockets and stuff, and then people seeing it and realising like you can just make small changes, and that it can have a flow on affect."* This finding suggests that sustainable implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy requires an organic, "grassroots" approach that builds momentum through demonstrated success and peer influence rather than top-down mandates.

Key Finding 4: Student Learning and Development

The CRP approaches developed through the action research process had significant positive impacts on student learning, relationships, agency, and social-emotional development (described in Table 2). These impacts were evident across multiple contexts and age groups, suggesting the broad applicability of culturally responsive approaches.

Revitalising Professional Identity Through Culturally Responsive Action Research

These findings strongly align with Appel's (2020) analysis of how teacher professionalism in Australia is being undermined by the current performance-dominated culture resulting from neoliberal conditions. Drawing on her previous work, Appel identified three essential components of teacher professionalism—knowledge, autonomy and responsibility—that are compromised by performativity pressures. The participatory action research approach developed in this project actively counteracts these damaging effects by creating a more balanced professional environment where power flows more evenly between teachers and administrators, and where teachers can exercise professional discretion in responding to student needs while still meeting systemic requirements.

The project methodology builds upon Diplock's (Diplock, Forthcoming) recent theorisation of action research as transformative professional learning for culturally responsive pedagogies. Building on the foundational work from the South Australian project that inspired this Canberra initiative, our approach similarly moved beyond prescriptive "checklists" toward creating conditions where teachers could develop responsive practices through attention to classroom events. As our research team observed, this approach enabled teachers to experience the generative potential of pedagogical ideas as catalysts for creative practice rather than as rigid protocols. The teachers in our study demonstrated a transformation similar to that documented in the South Australian project,

Table 2. Student Outcomes	
Improved student relationships	A consistent finding across multiple case studies was the improvement in student relationships and sense of connection. A teacher observed: <i>"Students were more empathetic to others (e.g., 'That must have made you feel sad')... Students are playing with a wider range of peers."</i> Another teacher similarly noted the transformation in student behaviour: <i>"The five lessons that respect, empathy, inclusion, those 3 words that I kept using, they started using those themselves and pointing out when they saw inclusion and when they saw respect."</i> This enhanced sense of connection extended to peer relationships, student-teacher relationships, and connections to place and community.
Enhanced student agency	The action research projects enhanced student agency and voice in multiple contexts. Students became more actively engaged in their learning and empowered to express their perspectives, as evidenced in several case studies where students took greater ownership of their learning environments. This increased agency was particularly evident in contexts where teachers deliberately created space for student input into curriculum and pedagogy.
Improvements in academic and social-emotional outcomes	Teachers reported improvements in both academic and social-emotional outcomes for students. One teacher noted: <i>"Interruptions down: in a phonics lesson of the same structure, interruptions decreased from 36 to 19. Student disruption data down: repeated disruption in a session with all teachers in the class decreased from 8 to 3."</i> These improvements suggest that culturally responsive approaches create more engaging and supportive learning environments that better meet student needs, leading to both reduced behavioural issues and enhanced learning outcomes. The findings on student impact demonstrate that culturally responsive pedagogy is not merely a theoretical framework but a practical approach that can significantly enhance student experiences and outcomes when implemented through thoughtful action research.

moving from seeking standardised methods toward embracing more experimental and responsive approaches that revitalised their professional identities.

Impact and Outcomes

The project has had a meaningful impact on enhancing cultural integrity and personalised learning at both school and system levels. By creating collaborative, affective professional learning environments, participating teachers were enabled to reflect critically on their practice, build intercultural understanding, and design more student-centred learning experiences.

Teachers reported feelings of autonomy and professional purpose, with one describing the project as the most valuable professional learning of their career.

At the system level, the project offers a model for culturally responsive professional learning. Its principles underpinned by teacher agency and embedding affective support could inform broader professional development strategies aligned with national curriculum priorities. With further implementation, the model has the potential to positively influence teacher preparation and satisfaction.

Additionally, the project has yielded seven clear measurable outcomes. (Details of these outcomes are presented in appendix C)

- **Outcome 1:** Written Outcomes. The team are working on an article to be submitted to Q1 journal and a book chapter. Another article is in the planning stage.
- **Outcome 2:** Superdiversity in Australian Classrooms Expert Panel. Researchers in diversity and education, presented to teachers, academics, and policy makers at the University of Canberra.



Superdiversity in Australian Classrooms Expert Panel with Emeritus Prof Robert Hattam, Ms Mikayla King, Prof Samantha Shultz, Dr Abigail Diplock, and Prof Irabinna Rigney, Chaired by Dr Margie Appel.

- **Outcome 3:** Action Research Symposium. Teacher participants presented their action research to colleagues, academics, and policy makers.



Teacher participants, project team, and UniSA CRP team at the Action Research Symposium October 2024.

- **Outcome 4:** Web page. The team has created case studies from the projects published on the Australian Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework website.
- **Outcome 5:** Impact Video. The team created a video of teacher interviews discussing the impact of participating in the project has had on their teaching.
- **Outcome 6:** Roundtable meeting with ACT Education Directorate. Following the Action Research Symposium, in collaboration with the project team, Senior Director Beth Craddy, organised a roundtable of Education Directorate directors to discuss possibilities for integration of CRP action research within ACT Education policy.
- **Outcome 7:** Presentation at conferences: ATEA 2024, AARE 2024, ATEA 2025 (Abstract accepted), AARE 2025 (Abstract submitted)

Engagement, Dissemination and Sustainability

This project adopted a multi-layered dissemination strategy designed to reach diverse stakeholder groups and embed findings within both academic and practice communities. The approach emphasised collaborative knowledge sharing rather than traditional top-down dissemination, reflecting the project's underlying principles of teacher agency and professional learning communities.

The project generated seven distinct dissemination outcomes, each targeting different audiences and purposes:

Academic Engagement: Two journal articles are in development for high-impact publications, with a third

planned. The team contributed to national academic discourse through presentations at four major conferences (ATEA 2024, AARE 2024, ATEA 2025, AARE 2025), including collaborative symposiums with South Australian researchers that strengthened national networks in culturally responsive pedagogy research.

Professional Community Engagement: Professional Community Engagement: The Superdiversity in Australian Classrooms Expert Panel and Action Research Symposium successfully brought together teachers, academics, and policy makers, creating dialogue between research and practice communities. Teacher presentations at the symposium demonstrated the project's capacity to position practitioners as knowledge producers rather than merely knowledge consumers.

Digital Knowledge Sharing: Case studies published on the Australian Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework website and an impact video provide accessible resources for broader professional learning communities. These digital assets enable ongoing engagement beyond the project timeframe.

Policy Engagement: A roundtable meeting with ACT Education Directorate representatives, organised in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education specialist Beth Craddy, created direct pathways for research-to-policy translation. This engagement involved key personnel from wellbeing, inclusion, and cultural integrity teams, indicating potential for systemic integration.

Evidence of Engagement Effectiveness: The enthusiasm demonstrated by teacher participants, with all ten reporting plans to integrate project methods into ongoing practice, suggests genuine professional transformation rather than superficial engagement. Several participants actively sought opportunities to share learnings with colleagues, indicating organic knowledge transfer within school communities.

Professional Network Development: A key sustainability outcome was the establishment of a collaborative professional learning network among participating teachers. Participants consistently identified this collegial support as transformative, with one noting the project provided "a very safe, accepting, non-judgmental group, which has been really good, because we don't always have that as teachers". This network provides ongoing peer support for culturally responsive pedagogy implementation.

Institutional Integration: The project's design enabled participants to embed learning within existing curriculum and pedagogical frameworks rather than requiring additional programmatic structures. Teachers reported successful integration of culturally responsive approaches across subject areas, suggesting sustainable practice change that doesn't rely on external support systems.

Leadership Development: Seven of the ten participants have expressed interest in serving as mentors in future iterations, providing a foundation for peer-led professional learning. This teacher leadership model offers a sustainable alternative to expert-delivered professional development.

Systemic Partnerships: Engagement with ACT Education Directorate personnel created foundations for policy-level support. The directorate's interest in further collaboration suggests potential for systemic integration beyond individual schools.

Future Development Planning

The project's success has catalysed planning for a Phase 2 initiative that will build on established foundations whilst extending reach and impact. This expansion reflects demonstrated demand from both participants and education system representatives. The proposed Phase 2 will leverage the mentor capacity developed among current participants whilst extending the collaborative action research model to additional schools and teachers.

Initial discussions with ACT Education Directorate indicate system-level interest in supporting expanded implementation, suggesting potential for embedding culturally responsive pedagogy professional learning within broader system professional development offerings. This alignment with system priorities enhances prospects for sustained impact beyond project funding cycles.

The sustainability evidence suggests that the project's emphasis on teacher agency, collaborative inquiry, and affective professional learning environments has created conditions for enduring practice change that extends beyond individual participants to influence broader professional communities and educational system approaches.

Wider Implications

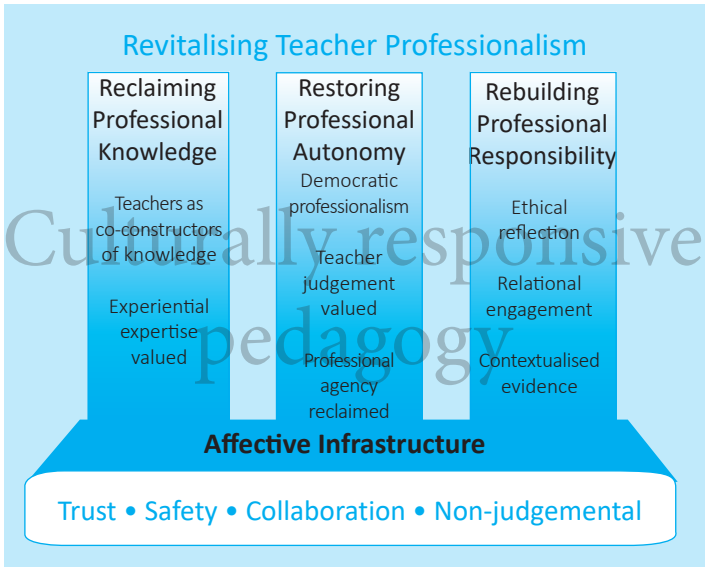
This project addresses a critical gap in Australian education: preparing teachers for increasingly diverse classrooms where more than a quarter of students come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (ABS, 2016), whilst the teaching workforce remains predominantly Anglo-Australian and middle-class (Santoro,

2014). Despite intercultural understanding being mandated in the national curriculum (Australian Curriculum, n.d.), many graduate teachers report feeling unprepared for such contexts (Appel & Lee, 2023).

Reconceptualising Professional Learning Infrastructure

The findings reveal fundamental limitations in current professional learning approaches and demonstrate the transformative potential of affective infrastructure in teacher development. Unlike traditional models that treat professional learning as technical skill acquisition, this project foregrounded emotional, relational, and ethical dimensions of practice. Teachers described the workshops as emotionally safe, collaborative spaces that enabled reconnection with core teaching values—highlighting how affective trust enables meaningful professional learning.

The action research model created opportunities for teachers to collaborate on issues directly relevant to their students and contexts, contrasting sharply with typical professional learning that participants noted was "determined by leadership" rather than emerging from classroom realities. This shift from compliance-oriented to inquiry-based professional learning enabled teachers to reclaim professional agency and demonstrate expertise as knowledge producers.



Institutional and System-Level Implications

Leadership Transformation: The research reveals both constraints imposed by managerial leadership approaches and the potential for transformation when schools invest in teacher-led, collaborative approaches. Supporting such infrastructure requires reconceptualising leadership as relational and facilitative rather than managerial, fostering school cultures that value teacher expertise whilst providing time and space for collaborative inquiry.

Balancing Accountability and Professional Trust:

Systems must recognise that meaningful change arises when teachers are supported to innovate, reflect, and act with professional integrity. Institutions prioritising rigid compliance risk alienating staff and diminishing the creativity and relational work that culturally responsive teaching requires. The project demonstrates how structured autonomy—providing frameworks whilst enabling teacher agency—can maintain accountability whilst foster innovation.

Sustainable Professional Learning Models: The findings suggest that sustainable professional learning must integrate affective conditions fostering autonomy, trust, and critical reflection. These environments empowered teachers to reclaim professional knowledge, take pedagogical risks, and articulate renewed purpose. Such approaches offer vital alternatives to dominant professional learning models whilst providing frameworks for intellectually rigorous and emotionally sustaining teacher development.

Contributing to Australian Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

By integrating findings with insights from South Australian research, this project contributes to developing contextualised frameworks for culturally responsive teaching that respond to settler colonial contexts whilst honouring Indigenous knowledges and diverse migrant experiences. While culturally responsive pedagogy has origins in African American scholarship (Gay, 2002, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2017), its translation to Australian contexts requires adaptation (Appel & Lee, 2023; Morrison et al., 2019). The emphasis on affective infrastructure adds innovative dimensions to this emerging field, demonstrating how professional learning centring affect leads to deeper engagement with culturally responsive practice.

This work aligns with critical education theorists arguing that education must be transformative rather than merely transmissive—disrupting inequality and fostering ethical, intercultural relationships (Elias & Mansouri, 2023). The project affirms that teachers, when supported to engage emotionally, ethically, and collaboratively with their communities, become powerful agents of cultural and educational change (Lillo & Aponte-Safe, 2019).

Conclusion and Reflections

The *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Action Research Project* demonstrates that meaningful professional transformation occurs when teachers are positioned as knowledgeable professionals capable of leading pedagogical change. The project's success can be attributed to deliberate attention to affective infrastructure—creating conditions of trust, safety, and collaborative engagement—combined with emphasis on professional autonomy through action research processes.

Key Success Factors

Participants consistently identified the emotional safety and collaborative nature of the professional learning as transformative, contrasting sharply with traditional compliance-oriented approaches. Teachers reported feeling "safe, accepted, non-judged"—conditions that enabled intellectual risk-taking and revaluation of classroom-based expertise. This affective foundation proved essential for implementing culturally responsive practices and sustaining pedagogical innovation.

The action research methodology positioned teachers as professionals capable of identifying relevant challenges, designing contextual responses, and theorising their own practice. This approach challenged disempowering top-down professional learning whilst affirming teachers' capacity to lead change within their contexts. Teachers expressed revitalised agency through collaborative inquiry and purposeful reflection, reconnecting with their fundamental purpose as educators.

Recommendations for Scaling and Implementation

For School Leaders: Foster relational, facilitative leadership approaches that balance structure with teacher agency. Create dedicated time and space for collaborative professional inquiry whilst maintaining appropriate accountability frameworks.

For Education Systems: Recognise that sustainable change requires investment in teacher-led professional learning that honours classroom expertise. Develop policies supporting affective conditions for staff wellbeing whilst maintaining educational standards.

For Teacher Education: Integrate culturally responsive pedagogy preparation that emphasises critical self-reflection, collaborative inquiry, and attention to affective dimensions of teaching relationships.

Future Research Directions

Further investigation is needed into the long-term sustainability of professional learning networks established through such projects. Research examining the relationship between affective infrastructure and student learning outcomes would strengthen evidence for this approach. Additionally, studies exploring how different school contexts and leadership approaches influence culturally responsive pedagogy implementation would inform scaling strategies.

Final Reflections

This project offers compelling evidence that professional learning combining attention to affective dimensions with teacher autonomy can effectively support both culturally responsive pedagogy implementation and teacher wellbeing. As education systems seek to respond to diverse student populations whilst supporting teacher retention, this approach provides a sustainable blueprint prioritising both student success and educator professionalism. The integration of rigorous inquiry with emotionally sustaining professional relationships creates conditions for enduring pedagogical transformation that extends beyond individual participants to influence broader educational communities.

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Appendix B Project Timelines

Table 3 represents the timeline for teacher participant engagement with the project and Table 4 represents the timeline for the research team.

Table 3			
Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Provocations Pedagogical re-design Plan action research	Do the action research	What did we learn?	Presenting findings
> Identify pedagogical challenges > Reading, discussing > Identifying a possible redesign project > Planning a unit of work > Designing the action research	> Teaching the unit and doing the action research	> Analysis of data and reflection	> Presenting research at Action Research Symposium

Table 4		
Month/Year	Activity	Method
<i>October-December 2023</i>	Phase 1 Orientation Establishing best practice ideas and workshop methods. Establish clear design for professional learning Create materials for workshops Fortnightly meetings of research team Liaise with Uni SA team to bring best practice to ACT. (Lead investigator travel to Adelaide for consultation with SA academics Professor Robert Hattam, Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney and Dr Abigail Diplock) Development of project to suit ACT context Recruitment of teachers (8-20 teachers) Development of professional learning materials Appointing a research assistant Finalise ethics	Discussions with UniSA collaborators and classroom teachers
<i>School term 1 2024 (February-April)</i>	Phase 2 Professional Development 2 Professional development workshops (1 full day plus 1 half day) for participants on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and action research Baseline teacher interviews. Mentoring sessions Guided curriculum development of unit of work designed by participating teachers	Baseline survey Recording of group discussions Observation of mentoring & curriculum development process (Field notes) redesigned curricula materials
<i>School term II 2024 (late April – June)</i>	Phase 3 Action Research Implementation 2 workshops – sharing and mentoring Implementation of new curriculum, ongoing monitoring and mentor support, teacher interviews, student assessment outcomes	Teachers gather data of choice for action research, reflective journals; Workshop discussions recorded Researcher reflections journalled
<i>School term III 2024 (July-September)</i>	Phase 4- Analysis and Presentation phase 1 half day workshop and full day presentation/conference Half day workshop a few weeks before the conference. Presentation of projects to other teachers and interested parties.	Final discussion recording Teacher presentations at symposium Teacher semi structured interviews
<i>School term IV -(October)-to Term I)-(April)-2025</i>	Phase 5- Output production phase Analysis of final results and production of key outputs	Thematic and narrative data analysis
<i>Extention -(April-June) 2025</i>	This project was originally proposed to be completed in April 2025. Given the inclusion of additional outputs, an extension until mid-June 2025 was approved to complete Phase 5	Article submissions Video production

Appendix C Outcome Details

Outcome 1	Written papers The team are working on an article to be submitted to Q1 journal and a book chapter. Another article is in the planning stage. • Reinvigorating teacher professionalism through CRP Action research (to be submitted to Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education) (Margie Appel, Abigail Diplock, Ann Hill, Alanna Heath) • Teachers and students transforming communities: Stories from CRP action research in the ACT (Dr Abigail Diplock, Dr Margie Appel, Dr Ann Hill, Alanna Heath)
Outcome 2	Superdiversity in Australian Classrooms Expert Panel The team organised a panel event on diversity and education, presented to teachers, academics and policy makers at the University of Canberra. Panel was held on October 17th 2024. Flyer created for the event provided in Appendix D. <u>Panelists</u> • Emeritus Professor Robert Hattam • Professor Irabinna Rigney • Professor Samantha Shultz • Dr Abigail Diplock • Ms. Mikayla King <u>Chair</u> Dr Margie Appel
Outcome 3	Action Research Symposium The team organised a symposium at the University of Canberra on October 18th, 2024 for teacher participants to present their action research to colleagues, academics and policy makers. A keynote address was given by Professor Irabinna Rigney and Emeritus Professor Robert Hattam. Flyer created for the event and examples slides from teacher presentations are provided in Appendix D.
Outcome 4	Webpage The team has created case studies from the projects published on the Australian Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Framework (https://culturallyresponsivedpedagogy.com.au/) website. The webpage provides a brief overview of the project as well as links to related articles, the impact video, and a case study for each participating teacher.
Outcome 5	Impact Video The team created a video of teacher interviews discussing the impact of participating in the project has had on the teaching. The video can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNe_AqPv5TI In addition to the link. The video is also published on the Australian Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Framework website and the Centre for Sustainable Communities website and socials.
Outcome 6	Roundtable meeting with ACT Education Directorate Following the Action Research Symposium, in collaboration with the project team Senior Director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, Beth Craddy, organised a roundtable to discuss CRP with educators and policy makers. <u>Attendees - ACT Directorate</u> • Beth Craddy, Senior Director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education • Sally Richardson, Assistant Director Cultural Integrity Professional Practice at ACT Education Directorate • Peter Kent, Principal Birragai • Bec Taylor, Strong Foundations team • Carlie Anderson, Wellbeing team • Anita Wesney, HS Strong Foundations • Anita Rushall, Wellbeing and Inclusion team • Murray Walpole, PBL team • Lisa Wilson. PBL team • Jason Borton, Executive Branch Manager, Education Programs and Services • Zoe Cole, Wellbeing and Inclusion team • Kate Bartlett, Wellbeing and inclusion • Dr Margie Appel, University of Canberra • Dr Abigail Diplock, University of South Australia
Outcome 7	Conference Presentations • ATEA 2024 – <i>Strength in Diversity: Igniting Creative Pedagogies through Action Research for Culturally Responsive Classrooms</i> • AARE 2024 Symposium collaboration with UniSA and University of Adelaide colleagues. – <i>Becoming Culturally Responsive: Schools, teachers, pedagogy Paper 3: Embracing the richness of diversity: Igniting creativity and cultural responsiveness through participatory action research</i>. Presented by Dr Margie Appel and Dr Abigail Diplock • ATEA 2025 July – Abstract accepted <i>Cultivating Teacher Professionalism Through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Outcomes of Collaborative Action Research</i>. To be presented by Dr Margie Appel, Dr Abigail Diplock, and Dr Ann Hill • AARE 2025 December – Abstract submitted with UniSA and University of Adelaide colleagues. To be presented by Dr Abigail Diplock, Ms Mikayla King, Dr Margie Appel, Ms Alanna Heath, Assoc Prof Samantha Schulz

Appendix D Action Research
Symposium and Superdiversity in
Australian Classrooms Expert Panel

An Affiliated Schools Project

Culturally Responsive
Pedagogy Action
Research Symposium

Join us for insightful discussions on culturally responsive teaching and action research on October 18th, 2024.

Presentations by participating teacher researchers at UC Inspire Centre, Teal Room
8:45 am-4:00 pm with reception following. Full program below.

Keynote Address by Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney and Emeritus Professor Robert Hattam.

Discover the transformative power of action research and culturally responsive teaching.

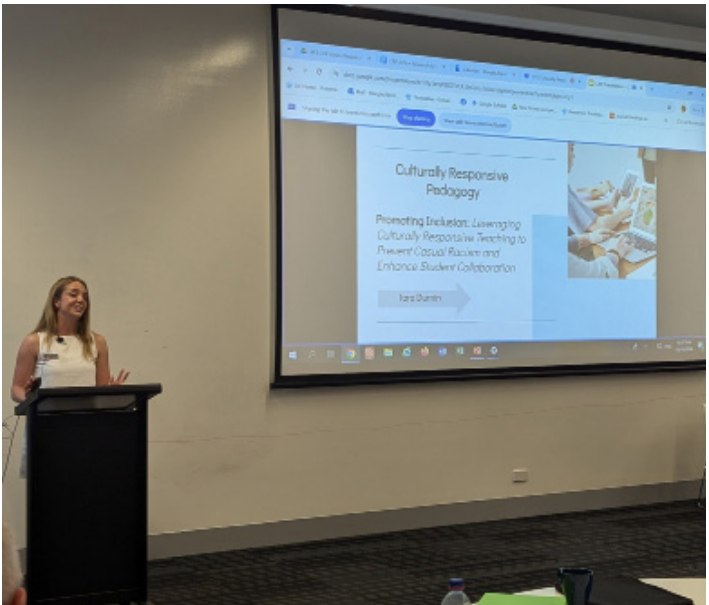
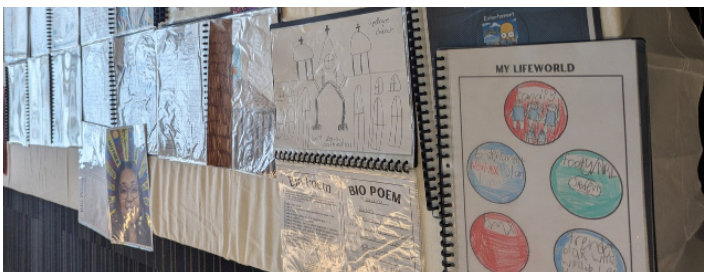
PROGRAM

Join us October 18th from 8:45-4:00 for the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Action Research in UC Inspire Centre

Please register with the link below or QR code.
<https://forms.office.com/r/iHjn3Pvgdw>



8:30-8:45	Registration
8:55-9:45	Keynote Address: Professor Irabinna Rigney and Professor Robert Hattam
9:45-10:45	Hayden Styman and Sara Meins 9:45-10:15 Tara Durmin 10:15-10:45
10:45-11:05	Morning tea
11:05-12:35	Michele Davis 11:05-11:35 Prudence Roveta 11:35-12:05 Natasha Monger 12:05-12:35
12:35-1:15	Lunch
1:15-2:45	Rosemarie Donnelly 1:15-1:45 Jennifer McGann 1:45-2:15
2:15-2:30	Afternoon tea
2:30-3:30	Kimberly Hall 2:30-3:00 Grace Johnson 3:00-3:30
3:30-4:00	Group discussion and Q&A
4:00	Refreshments on departure



Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Panel Discussion



What is an educational response to living in superdiverse Australia?

Panel members

Emeritus Professor Robert Hattam
Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney
Dr Samantha Schultz
Dr. Abigail Diplock
Mikayla King
Chaired by Dr. Margie Appel



Please Register!



Thursday, October 17th
5:30-7:30pm
UC Inspire Centre



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA

CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES



Expert panel: (from left to right) Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Mikayla King, Dr Abigail Diplock, Associate Professor Sam Schulz and Emeritus Professor Robert Hattam.