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Von Deest, Kerri-Anne; Gamble, Tara; Wenham, Kathryn; et.al.

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Introduction

Australia is failing to meet the target of closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Occupational therapy graduates will play a crucial role in providing Cultural Safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Mills et al., 2021).

Therefore, the development of cultural knowledge and capabilities through tertiary education curriculum is essential for occupational therapy students (Department of Health, 2014).

Research questions:

1. What are occupational therapy students' perceptions about their capabilities to practise Cultural Safety when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples?
2. How have occupational therapy students' perceptions about their capability in delivering Cultural Safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples changed following their participation in an 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Wellbeing Practice' course embedded in an undergraduate health program?

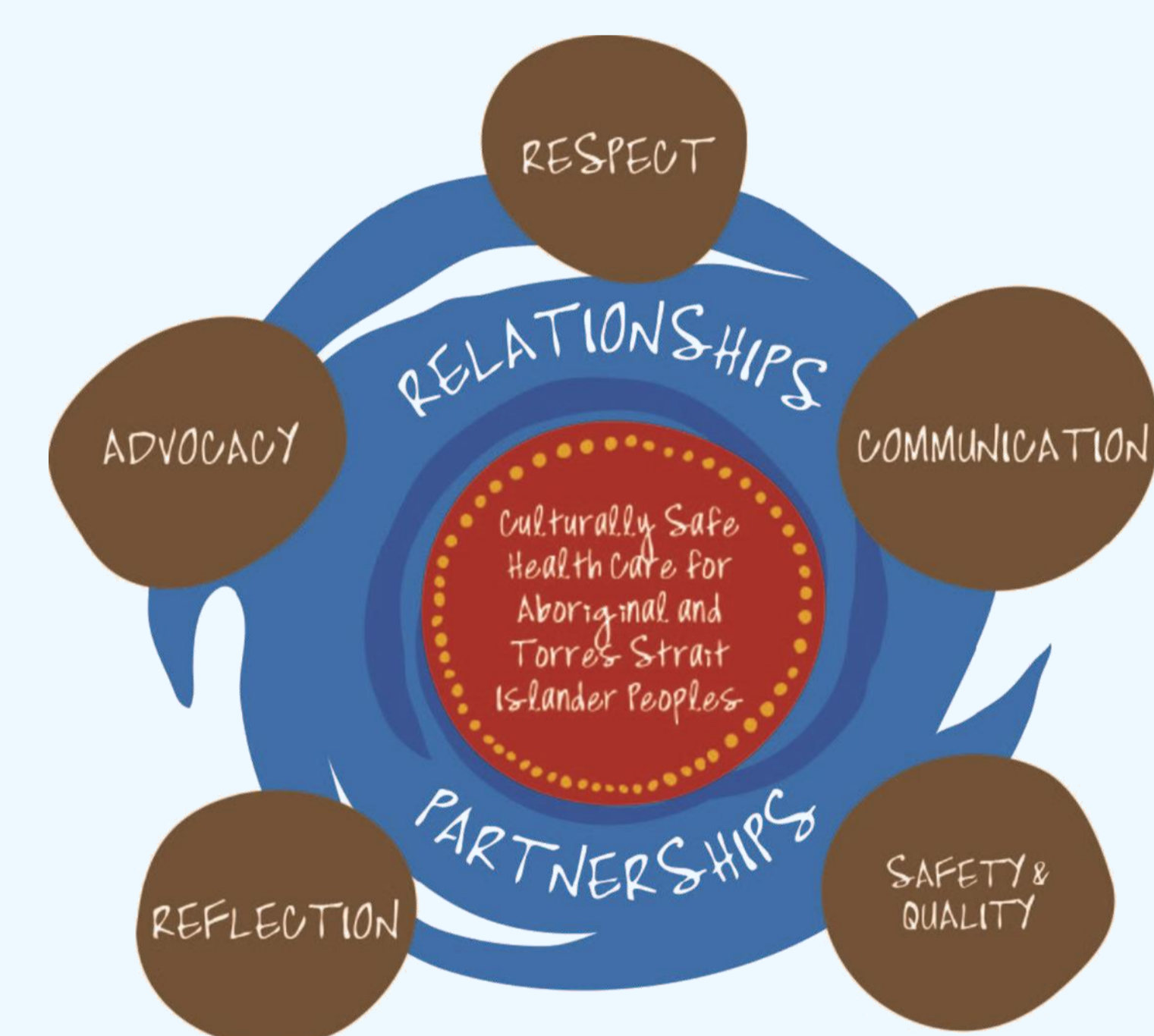
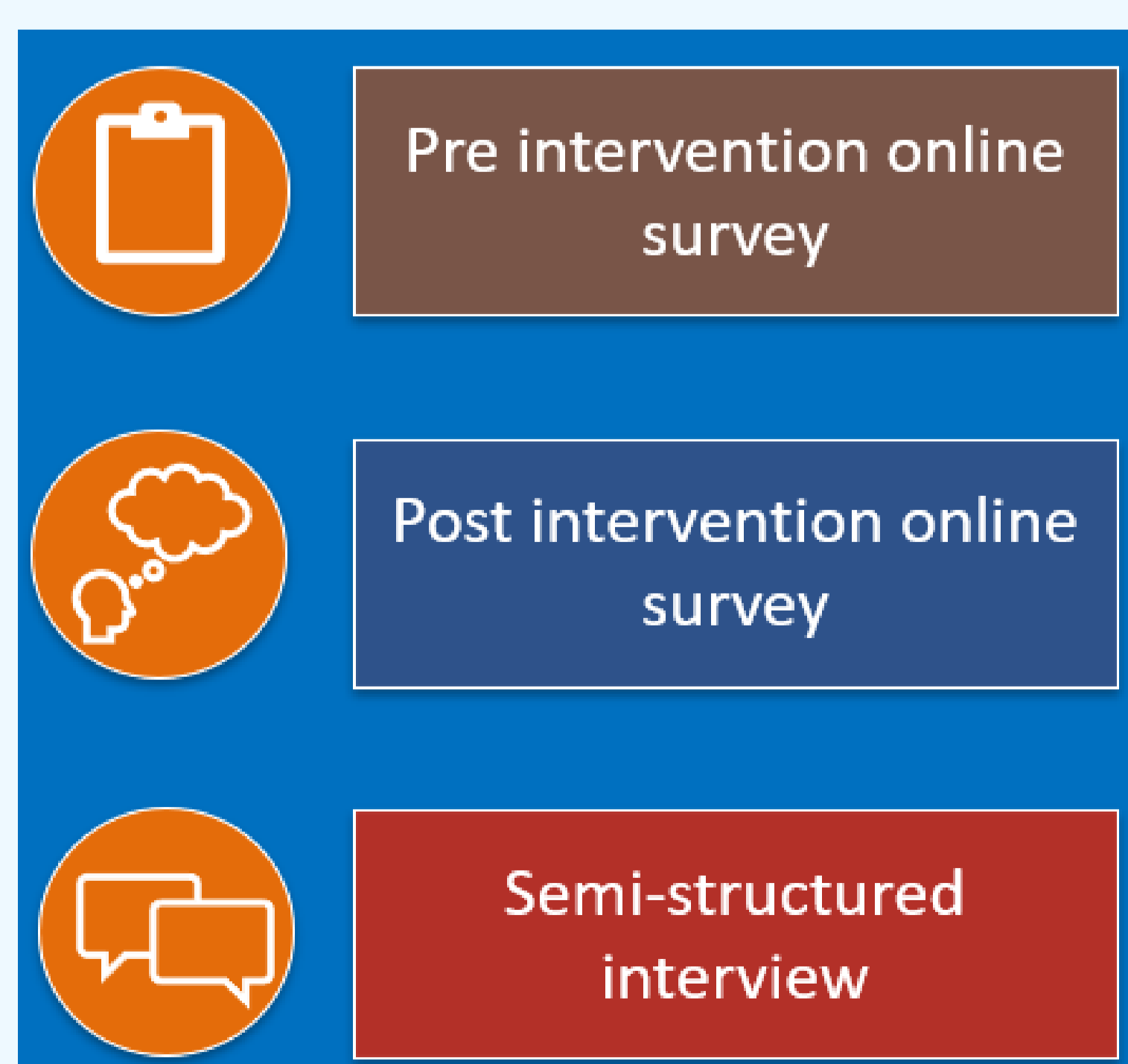


Image: Graduate Cultural Capability Model from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework (2014)

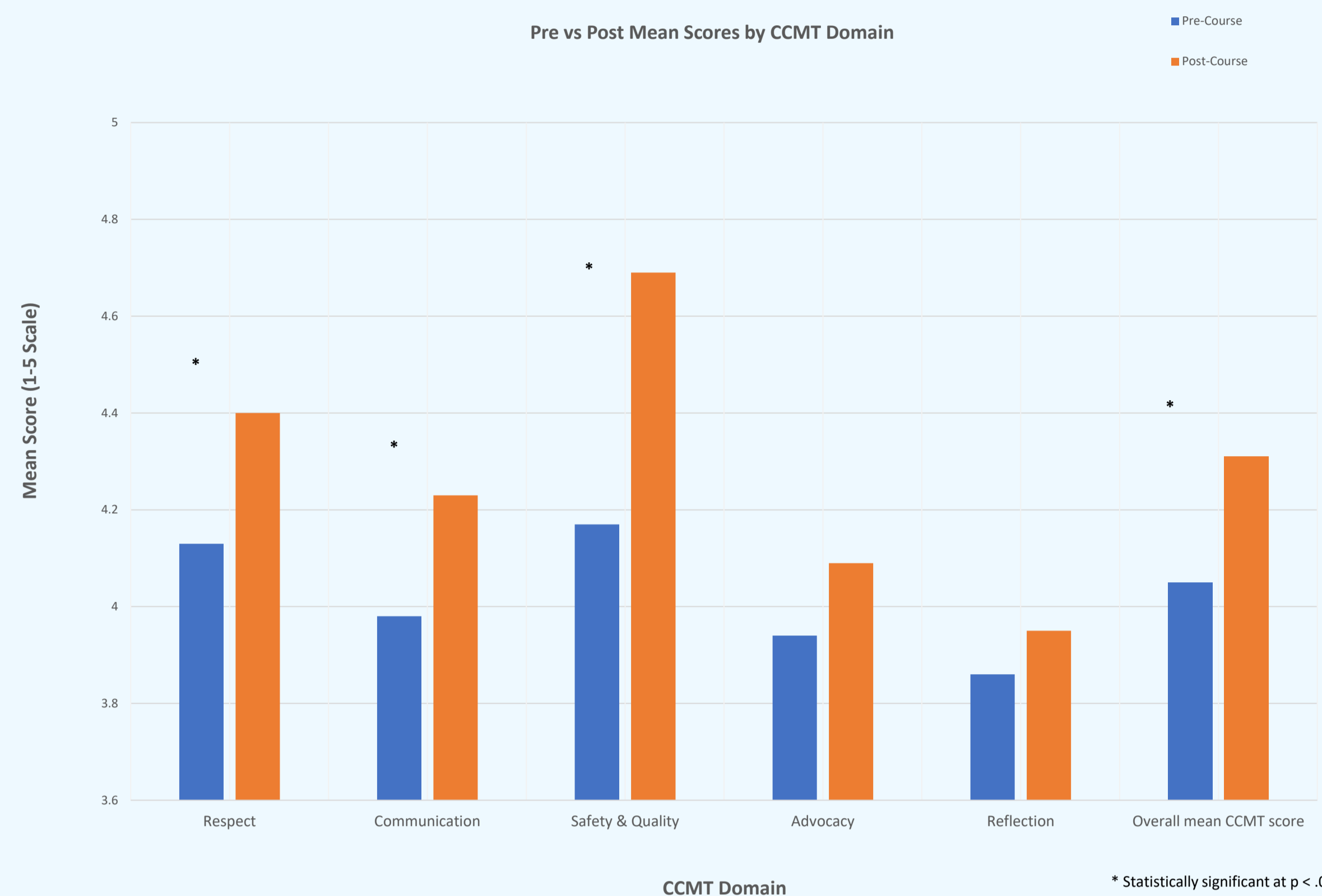
Methods

A concurrent, mixed methods research design was used, with data collected by online survey and semi structured interviews. The online survey used the **Cultural Capability Measurement Tool** (West et al., 2021) pre and post participation in the UniSC course 'HLT242 – Indigenous Wellbeing Practice'. The tool and the course are aligned with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework (Department of Health, 2014). Occupational therapy students who participated in the course were included in the data collection.



Results

Matching codes for 21 participants were statistically analysed. Pre-course scores were relatively high across all domains (overall mean = 4.05/5), suggesting that students entered the course with a moderate-to-strong sense of cultural capability. Despite this, statistically significant improvements were observed post-course and the overall mean increased to 4.31, indicating the course's ability to further enhance students' capability for Culturally Safe practise.



The interview data provided insights into 5 participants' perceptions of how the course and occupational therapy program overall have prepared them to practise Cultural Safety.

Thematic Analysis led to five themes:

"And I guess it's in that way that I would say my world view has, you could almost say, been flipped on its head.... HLT242 gave me moments of deep reflection."



"You know, there's nothing like embarrassment, for some internal motivation to do something."

Discussion/ Conclusion

Strongest gains were observed in reverse-coded CCMT items, suggesting that students may have shifted away from common misconceptions. Notable changes included increased agreement that **understanding First Peoples' social practices is relevant to practice**, and that **relationships with First Peoples impact clinical outcomes**.

Students also showed reduced agreement with statements suggesting that **First Peoples are all the same**, that **they receive special treatment from the government**, and that **history does not impact their health**.

These improvements may indicate a developing critical awareness of Cultural Safety and systemic inequity. The qualitative themes support these findings indicating that students have changed perceptions (worldviews) and improved capabilities (but also recognise the lifelong learning) to practise Cultural Safety when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' in future occupational therapy practice. However, it was also identified that there is more to be done in providing opportunities for learning in curriculum.

As future professionals in the healthcare system, occupational therapy graduates will play a crucial role in providing Culturally Safe practise for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that will contribute to 'Closing the Gap'.

Acknowledgment of Country

The University of the Sunshine Coast acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, work and study. We pay our respects to local Indigenous Elders past, present and emerging and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Artwork

Bidjali by Lyndon Davis (Kabi Kabi)

To read more about UniSC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual identity including the story of this artwork:



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