

Decolonizing Psychology Education in Australia Through the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project

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There is a critical need for Indigenous knowledges in psychology as a matter of epistemic justice and achieving health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In Australia, Indigenous psychologists are at the forefront of the decolonizing psychology movement by challenging the Western hegemony and privileging Indigenous knowledges in psychology. Situated within this movement, the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) is an innovative Indigenous-led initiative that is decolonizing psychology higher education and practice. Through Indigenous leadership, relationality, and application of decolonizing theory into practice, AIPEP is a significant vehicle in changing the narrative about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and affirming Indigenous knowledge systems in psychology higher education. We outline the culturally grounded methodology and principles of practice that AIPEP is grounded in, the multilayered initiatives providing a framework for decolonial change in psychology, and some of the critical decolonizing outcomes AIPEP has achieved, specifically the AIPEP national community of practice. Finally, we highlight key challenges and further work required, necessary for the ongoing success of decolonizing psychology.

Public Significance Statement

There is a critical need for Indigenous knowledges and decolonizing praxis in psychology to achieve health and well-being equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) is an Indigenous-led project leading the way in decolonizing psychology. Here, we describe the transformative role of AIPEP, including the Indigenous values and principles through which AIPEP is conducted in decolonizing psychology education. The place-based insights from the Australian psychology context may provide an example for global audiences to consider in engaging in decolonial praxis in psychology within their unique context, as well as other allied health disciplines.

Keywords: Indigenous psychology, cultural safety, decolonizing, Indigenous research methodology, Aboriginal Participatory Action Research

Nuria Ciofalo served as action editor.

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The authors of this article have respectfully attempted to follow the *Indigenous Referencing Guide for Indigenous Knowledges* (Indigenous Archives Collective et al., 2023). This work was supported by the Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing Research Program, funded by the Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission. The authors acknowledge the sovereign custodians, elders, and ancestors of the lands upon which this article was written—the Noongar and Gamilaraay peoples. The authors honor the strength and resilience of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Indigenous peoples across the world. They are a collective of Aboriginal academics (Belle Selkirk, Chontel Gibson, and Pat Dudgeon) and a non-Aboriginal

committed to the practice of allyship (Joanna Alexi), working in the space of social and emotional well-being, Indigenous psychology, and decolonizing practices. The authorship order of this article was driven by the decision making and governance of the Indigenous authors. Belle Selkirk is a member of the Noongar Indigenous Nation, Chontel Gibson is a member of the Gamilaraay Indigenous Nation, and Pat Dudgeon is a member of the Bardi Indigenous Nation.

The term *Indigenous* in this article respectfully refers to Indigenous peoples in a global or international context unless referenced otherwise, such as when referencing Indigenous knowledge systems or Indigenous psychology. When referencing Indigenous peoples in an Australian context, the article respectfully refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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continued



Belle Selkirk

Psychology as a discipline in Australia has been shaped by Western constructs and ideologies (Clark & Hirvonen, 2022, Clark is Kokatha, Wirangu. Hirvonen is Jaru, Bunuba. Dudgeon & Bray, 2023b, Dudgeon is Bardi; Dudgeon et al., 2023). The Western hegemony in psychology perpetuates coloniality not only in the discipline but also within the workforce, education, justice, and health care systems (Cullen et al., 2020; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Edwige et al., 2022, Edwige is Ngarabal). The ongoing, forced, and violent transmissions of colonialism have negatively impacted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Cullen et al., 2020; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Dudgeon & Walker, 2015) and Indigenous people across the globe (Fish et al., 2024; Fish is Tuscarora Nation; Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective et al., 2022).

Psychology in Australia has perpetuated colonial oppression over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the imposition of Western ontologies, epistemologies, and practices in psychology (Carey et al., 2017; Dudgeon et al., 2021; Dudgeon & Walker, 2015) and the misleading positioning of a universal psychology and individualistic constructs of human behavior (Dudgeon & Bray, 2023b; Dudgeon et al., 2021; Dudgeon & Walker, 2015; Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2024; Waitoki et al., 2018, Waitoki is Ngaati Hako, Ngaati Mahanga). This has caused harm to Indigenous ways of life, kinship systems, and connections to culture and country

(land, seas, skies). Moreover, it has contributed to profound intergenerational physical, emotional, and psychological suffering, which is compounded by ongoing social and political disadvantage (Clark & Hirvonen, 2022; Dudgeon & Bray, 2023b). This systemic imbalance perpetuates a cycle of power and privilege that undermines the rights and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Historically, Indigenous peoples have been positioned and socialized to hold the burden of colonization, whereby settler-colonial privilege enables complacency and diffusion of responsibility to engage in decolonizing practices (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, Moreton-Robinson is Goenpul, 2015) and unjustly displace this responsibility onto those being harmed (known as the colonial load; Weenthunga Health Network, 2023).

Yet, the strength and resilience of Indigenous peoples across the world, including the resistance to the colonial project, cannot be denied. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have engaged in both relationality and resistance since first contact (Dudgeon & Bray, 2023b). These are not opposing principles and/or processes. Rather, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have offered relationship and reciprocity with non-Indigenous peoples while still maintaining centered in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty, cultural identities, and knowledges (Dudgeon & Bray, 2023b). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being (ontology), knowing (epistemology), and doing (axiology) are complex and sophisticated knowledge systems that promote harmonious and sustainable ways of life that enable equitable and reciprocal relationships between cultural groups, kinship, land, waterways, skies, plants, animals, and ancestry (Clark & Hirvonen, 2022; Dudgeon et al., 2023). It is within these complex Indigenous knowledge systems that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have survived, thrived, and flourished for more than 65,000 years, even in the face of coloniality (Dudgeon, Bray, Smallwood, et al., 2020, Smallwood is Biri).

In this article, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges (hereinafter referred to as Indigenous knowledge systems), including Indigenous psychologies, offer ontological, epistemological, and theoretical innovations not only integral to the well-being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but also integral to all peoples connected to Mother Earth (Dudgeon, Bray, Smallwood, et al., 2020; Dudgeon et al., 2023; Gee et al., 2014, Gee is Aboriginal). There is indeed a critical need for Indigenous knowledges in psychology as a matter of epistemological

Belle Selkirk contributed to conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. Chontel Gibson contributed to conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. Pat Dudgeon contributed to conceptualization, funding acquisition, methodology, supervision, and writing—review and editing. Joanna Alexi

contributed to conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing.

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Chontel Gibson

justice and self-determination. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists are working with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to exercise a collective sovereignty by shaping theories, discourses, and practices in psychology (Dudgeon & Bray, 2023b). This shift toward self-determination and a broader human rights approach is fundamental to the flourishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the continuation of culture. Further, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ontological and epistemological sovereignty in Australia aligns with the global Indigenous psychology movement (Bhatia, 2019; Ciofalo et al., 2022; Dudgeon & Bray, 2023a).

The tumultuous journey in decolonizing psychology in Australia comes with the significant history and advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders across multiple disciplines (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Indigenous leaders such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul), Pat Dudgeon (Bardi), Tom Calma (Kungarakana/Iwaidja), and the late Lowitja O'Donoghue (Yankunytjatjara) have paved the way for decolonization work in health, education, research, and human rights. The decolonizing movement in psychology stands on the shoulders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders across different disciplines who have worked in tandem to disrupt and reshape settler-colonial power, privilege, and relationships in Australia.

Although colonialism follows a distinct pattern of White supremacy, including White power and privilege, it is applied and experienced differently in geographical locations and place-based contexts, including individual health disciplines. Therefore, conceptualizations and application of decolonizing praxis will vary according to the impact, meaning, and the voice of those being affected. Within this context, Indigenous psychologists are actively engaged in the decolonizing movement, by challenging the Western hegemony and privileging Indigenous knowledges, voice, and self-deter-

mination in psychology (Clark & Hirvonen, 2022; Edwige et al., 2022). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are experts in their lived experience and have a right to self-determination to define psychology from an Indigenous standpoint (Clark & Hirvonen, 2022). Decolonizing psychology requires challenging power differentials through privileging Indigenous leadership and Indigenous knowledge systems and in turn decentering Western epistemologies and settler-colonial dominance in psychology (Dudgeon & Bray, 2023a, 2023b). Our decolonial praxis and liberation are centered in our leadership, self-determination, and sovereignty of knowledges in psychology.

The interconnection between Indigenous leadership and reshaping relationship is integral to decolonizing practices. Decolonizing psychology in Australia requires a change in the relationship between Indigenous psychologists and non-Indigenous psychologists. Within that relational change, the expectation of Indigenous psychologists solely holding the colonial load (i.e., work required and/or consequences of decolonizing efforts) is challenged and the responsibility of decolonizing work becomes the responsibility of non-Indigenous psychologists, not just Indigenous psychologists (Bargallie et al., 2023, Bargallie is Kamilaroi, Wonnarua). That redistribution of power provides opportunities for Indigenous sovereignty and knowledges in psychology to be of equal epistemological value (Dudgeon et al., 2017; Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective et al., 2022). Such fundamental changes in relationships and disruptions to power are uncomfortable, challenging, and complex. Resistance, dissonance, and discomfort within the psychology profession are inevitable and necessary as an inherent part of the transformational unlearning and relearning.

Decolonizing practices are complex and heartfelt work. Through Indigenous leadership and relationality, this work can be done with integrity, reciprocity, and respect. An exemplar of this was the Australian Psychological Society's (Australian Psychological Society, 2016) apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognizing the direct and complicit roles the discipline of psychology in Australia has made in the oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Australian Psychological Society (2016) expressed an ongoing commitment to decolonizing praxis and system-wide change needed as a matter of human rights and epistemic justice:

To demonstrate our genuine commitment to this apology, we intend to pursue a different way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that will be characterised by diligently:

- Listening more and talking less
- Following more and steering less
- Advocating more and complying less
- Including more and ignoring less and
- Collaborating more and commanding less.



Pat Dudgeon

Through our efforts, in concert and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we envisage a different future. This will be a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people control what is important to them rather than having this controlled by others. (Australian Psychological Society, 2016, p. 1)

The historic apology by the [Australian Psychological Society \(2016\)](#) came to fruition through the leadership of Indigenous psychologists and the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA: <https://indigenouspsychology.com.au/>; Carey et al., 2017; Clark & Hirvonen, 2022) and redistribution of power and expectations held by the Australian Psychological Society in their role in decolonizing psychology theory and practice. The apology marked an important philosophical shift in the discipline, whereby Indigenous leadership and reshaping of relationship can occur, which is fundamental to decolonial change and action in the discipline of psychology in Australia. Though without committed action, the apology is a mere gesture that by itself does not enact the transformative change needed to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in psychology. A logical place for transformative change is within psychology education and training of future psychologists in Australia (Dudgeon et al., 2021). Education and training are highly influential spaces of learning, socializing, and shaping in the ways of knowing, being, and doing in psychology (Darlaston-Jones, 2015). If universities (also known as higher education providers [HEPs]) continue to play a role in perpetuating colonialism in psychology including the idea of a universal psychology, then the hegemony of Eurocentrism in psychology will persist, as will the epistemic violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Therefore, Indigenous leadership and the reshaping of the settler-colonial relationship within the psychology education and training spheres are key to transformational change

within the discipline. One such project that has been focusing on the decolonizing of psychology education in Australia is known as the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP).

AIPEP is an innovative Indigenous-led and governed project pioneering the way in decolonizing psychology higher education and practice. Indigenous leadership and relationality in AIPEP are critical components of disrupting the harmful cycle of coloniality in psychology and leading systemic change in psychology training. Currently, the AIPEP team comprised three Indigenous academics (BS, CG, PD) and one academic committed to the practice of allyship and identified by the Indigenous authors as an authentic ally (JA). At the core of the initiative, AIPEP aims to (a) increase decolonization curricula in psychology higher education; (b) increase the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students; and (c) build the capacity of the emerging psychology workforce to work in culturally safe ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families, and communities.

In this article, we will share the innovative work of AIPEP as an agent of change in the decolonizing movement in Australia, and we will do that by addressing the following aims:

1. illustrate our ways of knowing, being, and doing, including the values that we embody through the decolonizing work of AIPEP (via methodology, principles, and practice);
2. spotlight some of the critical decolonization outcomes as a result of the leadership of AIPEP, including a national community of practice; and
3. highlight key challenges and further work required, necessary for the ongoing success of decolonizing psychology.

The intent is to highlight how AIPEP is an exemplar of both Indigenous leadership and relationality in decolonizing psychology higher education. This leadership and relationality are required to redistribute and reshape settler-colonial power, expectations, and responsibility for decolonial change within the discipline of psychology. Importantly, AIPEP is an example of the practical application of decolonizing theory that is necessary to disrupt colonialism in psychology and lead to transformational change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

AIPEP Methodology, Principles, and Practice

AIPEP embodies Aboriginal Participatory Action Research (APAR) principles and practice throughout our research and project initiatives, which include the day-to-day operations. Indigenous academic, advocate, and psychologist, Professor



Joanna Alexi

Pat Dudgeon, and colleagues developed APAR (Dudgeon, Bray, Darlaston-Jones, & Walker, 2020), which privileges Indigenous peoples’ ways of knowing, being, and doing, which facilitates epistemic justice and promotes self-determination in both Indigenous research and psychology (Dudgeon, Bray, Darlaston-Jones, & Walker, 2020). Indigenous standpoint theory is APAR’s distinguishing feature, in which Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing are privileged. According to Moreton-Robinson (2013), Indigenous standpoint theory from an Indigenous woman’s perspective, in an academic setting, is grounded in Indigenous relationality, which is expressed in ways of knowing, being, and doing. For example, Indigenous ways of *being* stem from connections with country, including the ancestral beings who are not only eternal beings but also creators of life, lore, and values for all living and nonliving things. Indigenous ways of *knowing* reflect the sophisticated knowledge systems, cultural connections with family and country, and shared experiences relating to colonization and knowledge learned through the Western disciplines in which Indigenous women are trained in—be that psychology or other disciplines, like sociology and more. Finally, Indigenous ways of *doing* are an extension of our communal responsibilities and sovereignties, which are founded in our relationality. The application of Indigenous standpoint theory not only establishes Indigenous leadership but also promotes reflexive and transformative Indigenous research methods that are grounded in Indigenous research principles, values, and governance. AIPEP embodies APAR principles and practice. The methodology we apply in research is the methodology we apply in our everyday work and everyday being. Grounded in Indigenous ontology and epistemology, APAR is the way AIPEP practices. We seamlessly implement APAR principles across all aspects of what we do. The application of APAR within AIPEP is

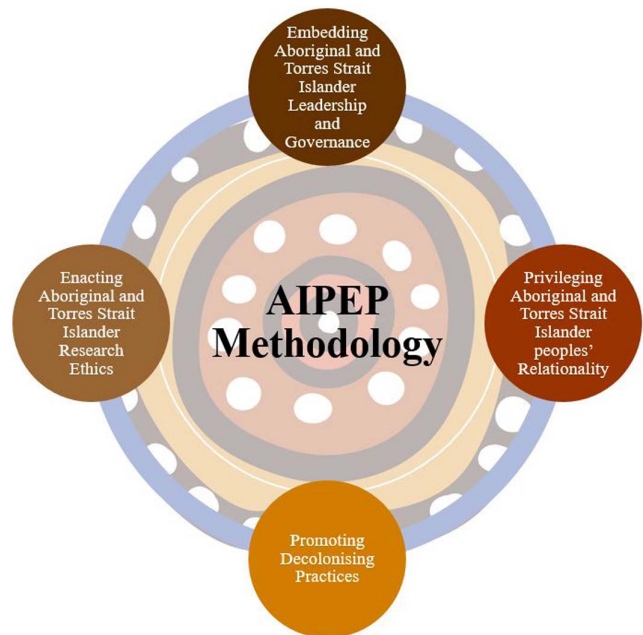
appropriate given the foundational congruencies and values that are embedded in decolonization. Notably, both APAR and AIPEP privilege Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. This includes advocating for epistemological justice through systemic transformation. APAR and AIPEP maintain that Indigenous leadership is a key feature that is nonnegotiable. Indigenous leadership, via governance structures and everyday practices, is embedded in every aspect of AIPEP’s work. The final congruence between APAR and AIPEP is that the nine guiding principles and Indigenous Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Gee et al., 2014) are valued and promoted, including the application of human rights, including self-determination.

The four key elements of APAR that are embedded in AIPEP are depicted in Figure 1.

Element 1: Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Governance

All aspects of AIPEP are led, governed, and facilitated by Indigenous leaders in collaboration and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organizations. AIPEP is governed by well-respected Indigenous psychologists and Academic Professor Pat Dudgeon who developed the overall governance structure in collaboration with key national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organizations, including AIPA. Discrete AIPEP initiatives are led or supervised by

Figure 1
Pictorial Representation of the Aboriginal Participatory Action Research Elements Used in AIPEP



Note. AIPEP = Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Indigenous members of the team, be that in research or other relevant AIPEP initiatives. AIPEP's overarching governance exists simultaneously with governance structures of distinct projects of AIPEP, which accommodates and privileges local and place-based cultural protocols, essential to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationality. Importantly, AIPEP's governance structure provides the necessary leadership and guidance for non-Indigenous peoples to engage in respectful decolonizing work while supporting the relationality and decolonization principles within this project.

Element 2: Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Relationality

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' relationality is derived from connection to the land, waterways, and skies (collectively referred to as country). It is from country that kinship, values, lore, ethos, and stories are founded (Bullen et al., 2023, Bullen is Wardandi, Nyoongar). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationality informs how individuals and communities see themselves and connect with each other, culture, ancestors, and spirituality (Bullen et al., 2023; Gee et al., 2014; Tynan, 2021, Tynan is Trawlwulwuy). Although AIPEP is a national project that upholds principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationality, AIPEP appreciates that local and place-based protocols are required to be upheld (Dudgeon et al., 2021; Tynan, 2021). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' relationality is actively privileged, encouraged, and role modeled by AIPEP. The role modeling supports place-based relationality, in that non-Indigenous allies can apply similar principles that support relationality within their work at the university, which privileges local cultural protocols.

Element 3: Promoting Decolonizing Practices

Through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationality, AIPEP nurtures the heart–mind–hand connection with the aim of enacting decolonizing changes to the psychology discipline. Similar to the framework outlined by Emery-Whittington et al. (2024; Emery-Whittington is Ngāti Unu, Ngāti Kahu hapū), we describe below how we embed decolonization practices:

1. *Positioning oneself and critical reflexivity:* It is essential to critically understand one's individual and collective positionality, privileges, and entitlements inherent in settler-colonial contexts. Unraveling one's position can elicit negative emotions and/or responses and ultimately result in thwarting decolonizing efforts (Ryall et al., 2021, Ryall is Galari Wiradyuri). AIPEP endeavors to create spaces and processes that support non-Indigenous allies to critically reflect on positionalities and distributions
2. *Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of knowing, being, and doing:* AIPEP privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing in a multitude of ways. For example, AIPEP ensures that the diversity and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (including psychology students) are visible and respected in the profession. AIPEP promotes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination, Indigenous leadership, and governance across all aspects of the work we do. AIPEP amplifies Indigenous psychology as a discipline within its own right. AIPEP supports, guides, and collaborates with non-Indigenous allies to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' voices, theories, and practices in all aspects of psychology, be that in education, policy, or practice.
3. *Promoting transformational changes:* Transformative change must be sustainable, impactful, and of value for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, otherwise inequality and settler-colonial oppression will remain. AIPEP embeds transformational activities and strategies in every aspect of its work, which includes collaborations with non-Indigenous psychology partners to implement decolonizing initiatives. For example, AIPEP provides frameworks for the psychology discipline to decolonize psychology curricula, better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students, and promote culturally responsive education and practice. AIPEP works with psychology regulators, stakeholders, and key decision-makers to support the development, review, and implementation of policies that support the decolonizing of psychology.

Element 4: Enacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Ethics

While the research components of AIPEP require human research ethics committee clearance, all aspects of AIPEP align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ethics. The *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait*

Islander Research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020) contains four principles: Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous leadership, impact and value, and finally, sustainability and accountability. These principles are embodied throughout AIPEP Elements 1–3 (above). Similarly, the six core values of the National Health and Medical Research Council’s Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities: Guidelines for Researchers and Stakeholders (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018) are also embedded throughout AIPEP. For example, the National Health and Medical Research Council’s core values relating to equity, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility are clearly identified in the above elements. However, not as clearly illustrated are references to cultural continuity and spirit and integrity. For example, *cultural continuity* is maintained via the privileging of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ relationality, and the value relating to *spirit and integrity* is maintained by embedding the remaining principles.

In the next section, we illustrate how the values and methodological underpinnings of AIPEP have led to key outcomes that have shaped the implementation and successful uptake of AIPEP initiatives.

Outcomes of AIPEP

Foundational Work: AIPEP Frameworks

Through the enactment of Indigenous values and methodological principles, described in the preceding section, AIPEP (2013–2016) developed three core frameworks, known as the:

1. Curriculum Framework (<https://indigenousspsyched.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Curriculum-Framework.pdf>), which provides a comprehensive guide to decolonizing psychology higher education and embedding cultural responsiveness with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in psychology curricula (Dudgeon et al., 2016a),
2. Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students (<https://indigenousspsyched.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/RRG-Guidelines.pdf>), which outlines strategies that HEPs can take to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students (Dudgeon et al., 2016b); and the
3. Workforce Capabilities Framework (<https://indigenousspsyched.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Workforce-Framework.pdf>), which articulates graduate and professional development workforce capabilities required for appropriate and effective care with

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Dudgeon, Harris, et al., 2016).

Importantly, the three landmark frameworks received endorsement from major national psychology stakeholders and accrediting bodies of psychology, namely the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC: <https://apac.au>), the Australian Psychological Society (<https://psychology.org.au/>), and the AIPA (<https://indigenousspsyched.org.au/>).

System Change: APAC Criterion 3.8

In 2019, as a direct result of AIPEP’s leadership, advocacy, and the foundational frameworks produced, APAC (the body which accredits psychology higher education programs) included a new cultural responsiveness criterion (Criterion 3.8) in their accreditation standards (https://apac.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/APAC-Accreditation-Standards_v1.2_rebranded.pdf; Australian Psychology Accreditation Council, 2019). This criterion necessitates HEPs to embed cultural responsiveness in their psychology curricula. Importantly, Criterion 3.8 affords HEPs the freedom to meet this standard according to the place-based context of their provider.

In response, this led to an impetus for HEPs to transform their psychology curricula to meet Criterion 3.8 necessary for accreditation. For many Indigenous psychologists and allies in psychology education, this system change was a welcome relief and imbued hopefulness that cultural responsiveness and Indigenous knowledges will be systematically embedded into psychology curricula as mandatory learning that holds the same epistemological equivalence as Western knowledges. For some HEPs, who have historically excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, contexts, and knowledges in psychology curricula, this has been both a significant opportunity and a challenge.

Multilayered Initiatives

Given this context, AIPEP was revitalized in 2020 (to present) under the Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (<https://timhwb.org.au/>) project. Since then, AIPEP has been working to implement the foundational work of the three AIPEP frameworks as a mechanism for decolonizing work. Aligned with the frameworks, AIPEP has focused on decolonizing three key areas in psychology: higher education curriculum, higher education Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support, and psychology workforce practice. This multilayered implementation of AIPEP initiatives is illustrated in Table 1.

We include this table to show the breadth of the practical application decolonizing initiatives through the Indigenous leadership of AIPEP. Each of AIPEP’s decolonizing goals has a corresponding framework and resources for implementation that provides essential guidance for decolonizing work and

Table 1
Summative Representation of AIPEP

Goal of AIPEP	Framework development (2013–2016)	Implementation (2020–present)	Advocacy and support (relevant to all areas)
Increase decolonizing curricula in psychology higher education	<i>Curriculum Framework</i> (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Curriculum-Framework.pdf ; Dudgeon et al., 2016a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codevelopment of policy guidance, for example, APAC Annexure document_v1.1-final.pdf; Bucks et al., 2023) • Curriculum focused on Indigenous-led research, for example, AIPEP Scoping Study (Gibson et al., 2025; Selkirk et al., 2025) • Decolonizing psychology resource development with peak bodies, for example, Emerging Minds (https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/psychology-education-needs-to-reflect-the-lives-of-aspiring-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-students/?audience=organisation; Selkirk et al., 2023), Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/resource/conversations-about-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-sewb-vee-psychology-fact-sheet/; Selkirk & Alexi, 2023), APAC (2022, 2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIPEP CoP • Stakeholder engagement and support • AIPEP website (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/) • Journal articles, for example, <i>Indigenous Knowledges in Psychology</i> collection (https://www.iandfonline.com/journals/raup20/collections/Indigenous-Knowledge-in-Psychology) • Media releases, for example, <i>National Indigenous Times</i> (https://nit.com.au/22-03-2024/10418/australian-indigenous-psychology-education-project-keeping-the-fire-burning-blak-loud-and-proud)
Increase the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students	<i>Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students</i> (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/RRG-Guidelines.pdf ; Dudgeon et al., 2016b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity pathways guidance document (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/resource/guidance-in-creating-honours-fourth-year-and-postgraduate-equity-pathways-in-tertiary-psychology-for-aboriginal-and-or-torres-strait-islander-applicants-a-report-from-the-equity-pathways-working-gr/; Ohan et al., 2023) • Student focused Indigenous-led research (forthcoming 2025) • Equity pathways guidance document (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/resource/guidance-in-creating-honours-fourth-year-and-postgraduate-equity-pathways-in-tertiary-psychology-for-aboriginal-and-or-torres-strait-islander-applicants-a-report-from-the-equity-pathways-working-gr/; Ohan et al., 2023) • Student focused Indigenous-led research (forthcoming 2025) • Indigenous psychology chapters for undergraduate psychology textbooks, for example, Wiley textbook (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/resource/chapter-3-indigenous-psychology-in-australia/; Dudgeon et al., 2022), and Pearson Australia textbook (forthcoming 2024) • Resource development to support the psychology workforce, for example, Cultural Safety in Psychological Supervision (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/supervisors/; Selkirk et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c) • Resource development to support the psychology workforce, for example, Cultural Safety in Psychological Supervision (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/supervisors/; Selkirk et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c) • Workforce Capacity Building, for example, partnerships with the Psychology Board of Australia, Australian Psychological Society 	
Build the capacity of the emerging psychology workforce to work in culturally safe ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families, and communities	<i>Workforce Capabilities Framework</i> (https://indigenouspsyched.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Workforce-Framework.pdf ; Dudgeon, Harris, et al., 2016)		

Note. AIPEP encompasses multilayered initiatives including core goals, foundational frameworks, implementation, advocacy, and support. AIPEP = Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project; APAC = Australian Psychology Accreditation Council; AIPEP CoP = AIPEP Community of Practice.

ways in which non-Indigenous peoples can hold colonial load. Further Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing are centered throughout the multilayered initiatives. Taken together, AIPEP's practical application of decolonizing theory and Indigenous knowledges through Indigenous leadership and relationality allows for transformative change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been oppressed by the discipline of psychology. [Table 1](#) demonstrates the relationship between the decolonizing goals of AIPEP, the frameworks developed, and the transformative implementation that is currently occurring, across the three focus areas. AIPEP's multilayered initiatives occur across a range of domains, including policy-related initiatives, capacity-building activities, and resource codevelopment. Importantly, AIPEP is at the forefront of advocacy and support in each domain, which occurs via community engagement, such as through stakeholder partnerships and collaborations; resource dissemination across diverse contexts and for diverse audiences; and AIPEP's national community of practice of psychology educators.

[Table 1](#) illustrates that embedding transformative change in decolonizing psychology curricula, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support, and workforce requires a synthesis of Indigenous-led initiatives across each of these domains. Therefore, decolonizing initiatives are multilayered, cumulative over time, and, importantly, interconnect with the original aims and frameworks of AIPEP.

In the next section, we describe the AIPEP Community of Practice (AIPEP CoP), one of the key outcomes that have been achieved in the implementation of AIPEP.

AIPEP Community of Practice

In 2020, AIPEP initiated a national community of practice of psychology educators working together in decolonizing psychology higher education across Australia to meet and exceed accreditation standards in cultural responsiveness (Criterion 3.8). The AIPEP CoP unites heads of schools of psychology, psychology course conveners and educators, as well as peak industry partners and leaders in Indigenous psychology, such as representatives from AIPA. Currently, 34 HEPs (equivalent to 80% of all providers that offer APAC-accredited psychology courses) are actively involved in the AIPEP CoP.

The AIPEP CoP has grown since its inception, with attendance almost doubling in the first year. The membership of the AIPEP CoP now includes approximately 100 members, often several representatives from each HEP. However, a core membership of approximately 20–30 representatives (predominantly non-Indigenous senior psychology educators, course conveners, and heads of schools) are actively engaged in the AIPEP CoP meetings and hold the colonial load of the decolonizing work. It is understood that the broader membership of the AIPEP CoP connects with their nominated

representatives and the broader CoP, as needed. Together, this highlights both the need for a community space that brings educators together to share knowledges and build capacity *and* the ongoing commitment of HEPs to progress their journey in decolonizing psychology curricula to meet and exceed Criterion 3.8.

AIPEP CoP meetings are held monthly, alternating between informal and formal gatherings each month. Informal gatherings (referred to as yarning) encourage members to actively engage in discussions and discourses regarding transformational change in psychology education and student support or engage in critical reflexivity regarding issues they are facing in decolonizing curricula. In so doing, this has allowed members to shift from passive attendance to active responsibility for the colonial load and role model decolonizing praxis in education, student support, and beyond (Element 3).

In upholding Indigenous leadership and governance (Element 1), formal meetings of the AIPEP CoP are facilitated by the AIPEP leadership team, who also hold leadership in scheduling, communications, Indigenous-vetted resource sharing, and management of the AIPEP website (including the AIPEP CoP member portal). Formal meetings consist of land acknowledgments and introductions with the aim of relationally locating each member to one another and reaffirming their goals and intent in the AIPEP CoP (Elements 2 and 3). Project updates by the AIPEP team allow members to stay informed with system transformations occurring in cultural responsiveness and safety, and Indigenous recommended resources to guide their decolonizing curricula and student support (Element 1). Members are provided with unique opportunities to listen to and learn from Indigenous psychologists, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as Indigenous peoples from other global nations, graciously offering to share wisdoms and practices in Indigenous knowledges in psychology (Elements 2 and 3).

While the AIPEP CoP members are situated within HEPs, its function is multilayered and traverses across each of the three focus areas of AIPEP (as shown in [Table 1](#)) including the core frameworks and goals of supporting efforts in decolonizing curricula, increasing student support, and capacity-building the psychology workforces (education and practice).

Working Groups

One of the important developments in the AIPEP CoP meetings has been the establishment of Working Groups within the Indigenous governance structure of AIPEP. This arose from feedback from AIPEP CoP members wishing to collaborate with other members in the group on important topic areas related to decolonizing psychology education and/or student support (Element 3). Often, there was a need for members to develop resources that support ongoing

decolonization transformations within their HEP. Therefore, establishing member-led Working Groups provided an opportunity to work in a collective and safe place to develop needed resources, that have broader impacts.

The Working Groups are led by members of the AIPEP CoP and link back to AIPEP governance for updates, support, and guidance on work produced by the groups (Element 1). The formal meetings provide AIPEP CoP members with an opportunity to feedback progress and updates from each Working Group to the broader AIPEP CoP membership. Aligned with Elements 2 and 3 the working groups were grounded in relationality and decolonizing praxis.

Example of Working Group—Equity Pathways Working Group

One example demonstrating the success of the AIPEP CoP Working Groups comes from the Equity Pathways Working Group, established through the AIPEP CoP in 2022 and chaired by Associate Professor Jeneva Ohan (academic committed to the practice of allyship) and Dr. Stacey McMullen (Kooma, Clinical Psychologist and Scholar). The intent of this working group was to codesign a resource to provide guidance to HEPs on developing equity pathways to honors and postgraduate study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students. The leadership and advocacy of the cochairs brought working group members together through a series of iterative meetings to share knowledges about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander equity pathways and student support initiatives. Co-chairs regularly consulted AIPEP governance for advice on approaches and processes in the working group, updates on the status of the working group, contribution and review of drafted documents, final approval, cobranding, and publication of resources with AIPEP (Element 1).

AIPEP leadership encouraged ongoing relationality and decolonizing praxis within the Equity Pathways Working Group to facilitate allyship, open communication, trust building, and cultivating safety among the group (Elements 1–3). The outcome was the publication of a foundational guidance document supporting HEPs in developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander equity pathways in honors and postgraduate psychology (Ohan et al., 2023, available at <https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/publications/guidance-in-creating-honours-fourth-year-and-postgraduate-equity>). This guidance document has been widely disseminated by the Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association (<https://www.hodspa.org.au/>), and initial positive feedback from the AIPEP CoP members has indicated that the resources are useful and needed to support their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support initiatives. Future research is required to confirm this finding.

Challenges and Ongoing Work

The decolonizing work of AIPEP is multilayered, time-intensive, and ongoing. The unwieldy nature of colonization means that it will continue to negatively impact on Indigenous peoples, including undermining any transformative actions and steps taken to decolonize the psychology profession. Therefore, the current outcomes of AIPEP still need to remain a priority and be constantly scrutinized, so that it sustains all efforts to privilege Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. When collaborative approaches are privileged and welcomed, they lead to authentic projects and initiatives. However, these initiatives are not always adequately resourced and funded. That lack of funding requires individuals and/or organizations to absorb the resource cost of some of the work. We learned that this unexpected extra burden is in fact an expectation of transformational work, which we could try to accommodate in future AIPEP projects. However, under-resourcing for decolonizing psychology, in Australia and abroad, remains a key risk for all work—past, present, and future. Although AIPEP was committed and conscious to actively distribute the work of decolonization, at times Indigenous people did carry more of this workload. We used our critical reflexive processes to check in with all stakeholders involved, and when necessary, we shifted who was responsible for the work required at the time.

Within psychology and indeed more broadly, many professionals are socialized to expect that Indigenous people carry the load of decolonization, including any resistance to decolonization. That expectation is problematic and indicative of ongoing colonial oppression, as it is not the sole responsibility of Indigenous peoples to decolonize psychology. Rather, addressing colonial oppression is an equal responsibility and partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Bargallie et al., 2023). Finally, while all AIPEP partners are committed, the levels of commitment vary. The variation was likely influenced by many variables such as personal values, cultural responsiveness journeys, systemic issues, and other competing priorities in life.

While AIPEP has made a strong and coordinated start to decolonizing psychology in Australia, much more work is required. In relation to decolonizing psychology curricula, further research could include formal evaluations of the impact of curricula transformations already undertaken by some HEPs. In relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students, this might include gaining insights into students' lived experiences of entrance/equity pathways, as well as experiences of newly developed curricula incorporating Indigenous knowledges and cultural responsiveness in psychology. In relation to the psychology workforce, AIPEP could further extend its support to members of the psychology discipline regarding decolonizing approaches and practices with the aim of increasing

cultural safety with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Conclusion

In this article, we have described the transformational work of AIPEP as a vehicle of change in decolonizing psychology education in Australia. Through Indigenous leadership, relationality, and decolonizing praxis, AIPEP resists coloniality in Australian psychology and is reshaping the narrative about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in psychology. Through the implementation of AIPEP, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledges, lived experiences, culture, and voices are being celebrated and prioritized in psychology higher education. Crucial to this has been the decentering of Western epistemologies and recentring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing (Emery-Whittington et al., 2024; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Ryall et al., 2021), thereby facilitating Indigenous epistemic justice and equity in psychology (Dudgeon & Bray, 2023b; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Dudgeon et al., 2021). Importantly, AIPEP is disrupting coloniality through the practical application of decolonizing theory via multilayered initiatives that build capacity and guide non-Indigenous peoples to engage in decolonizing work in psychology. Decolonizing theory and discourse must lead to transformational change in the systems that oppress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While AIPEP has had a strong emphasis and presence in the higher education space, the work of AIPEP has been a catalyst for change in the psychology workforce and the discipline broadly. The AIPEP CoP is an exemplar of how Indigenous leadership and relationality can facilitate decolonial change in psychology with integrity, reciprocity, and respect. AIPEP's methodology and principles of practice enable the reshaping of settler-colonial power, expectations, and responsibility for the colonial load in psychology. This redistribution of power is essential to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty and liberation in psychology and the broader community.

The collective work of decolonization in psychology is complex and multilayered and takes into account place-based histories, contexts, definitions, and approaches to decolonization. While momentum in decolonizing efforts is evident, there are ongoing challenges that require further work to be done. The unwieldy nature of colonization and hegemony, especially in the higher education sector, means that the inherent power differentials between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous knowledges continue, as does the attacks on the epistemic self-determination of Indigenous peoples in psychology. AIPEP's continued presence, leadership, and relationality in psychology education and

practice are necessary as a matter of sustained epistemic justice in the discipline of psychology in Australia.

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Received April 2, 2024

Revision received August 9, 2024

Accepted November 19, 2024 ■