

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Helping Learners Connect with the Learning

In Western Australian Catholic schools there is a commitment to Growing Enriched Cultural Knowledge in Our Schools (GECKOS).

GECKOS is the acronym that includes programs and resources aimed at achieving the growth of enriched cultural knowledge in our schools. However GECKOS is not just about programs and resources, it is actually the philosophy underpinning all of them that is crucial.

The knowledge gained from many years teaching in classrooms and school libraries in both the Government and Catholic education systems has helped shape the understandings that are shared in the *Connecting the Dots* workshop.

In working extensively with teachers in schools it has become evident that while many are keen to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms and realise the importance of doing so, it is not happening in any consistent way. Why? It seems that their life experiences and teacher training have not prepared them adequately to do so. There is a fear of doing or saying the wrong thing. There is a lack of confidence due to limited knowledge, experience and pedagogy.

How can teachers help their students connect with Aboriginal knowledge if they themselves have not?

It is imperative that teachers connect with the underlying principles because while the information or knowledge is easily accessible and an increasing number of excellent resources available, if the learner does not learn how to connect meaningfully, it is questionable that the learning will have any depth.

The workshop includes a number of discussion points that will help add substance including:

- Aboriginal Studies is for ALL Australians
- Aboriginal Studies is often taught on a model of **difference** rather than a model of similarity. It is important that learners connect with the **similarities** of our shared humanity
- Aboriginal Studies tends to be content driven but learners need to be encouraged to engage in critical thinking – not just to learn **about** an event but what they **think** about it.
- Look at it differently – thinking outside the familiar
- Start with the positive, at a point of hope
- Create context for the learning

Learners need to internalise these 'new understandings' so that we can steadily move towards "*a United Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.*"

(from *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation*, 2000)