PROJECT TITLE: Cultural Learnings: Strengthening Aboriginal children’s wellbeing

FIELD OF RESEARCH CODE: TBC

PROJECT SYNOPSIS:

This research will explore the role of identity upon the wellbeing and academic outcomes for urban WA Aboriginal primary school children. To ensure Aboriginal children engage successfully in school then their culture, language, and identity must be recognised, valued and taught so that their self-esteem and wellbeing have a strong platform in which to strengthen their school engagement. This program will achieve this by:

- developing relationships, meaning and active collaborations in holistic Aboriginal ways
- focussing on key aspects of cultural learnings and cultural safety
- developing cultural learnings programs and school cultural safety plans
- referencing Indigenous theory, research evidence and practice
The aims of the program are to: 1. Identify effective strategies for developing relationships, meaning and active collaborations in holistic Aboriginal ways between three Aboriginal and school communities (Study 1); 2. Identify from the perspectives of multiple Aboriginal stakeholders (Elders, parents/carers, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, Aboriginal teachers and principals) key aspects of cultural learnings and cultural safety that need to be included in programs aiming to enhance primary Aboriginal students' wellbeing (Study 2); 3. Develop, implement, and test the impact of a suite of novel cultural learnings programs and school cultural safety plans that aim to strengthen Aboriginal primary school students' wellbeing (Study 3). We will test the impact of the Cultural Learnings program on: (A) Aboriginal primary students' knowledge and self-esteem of identity and culture, social and emotional wellbeing, cultural security, racial strengthening strategies; and school outcomes (achievement, attendance, and retention); (B) Elders', Parent/Carers' knowledge and self-esteem of identity and culture, racial strengthening strategies, self-efficacy and confidence in teaching children about identity, culture, and coping strategies in response to racism and; (C) The school community by undertaking a school Cultural Security audit before and after the intervention to evaluate the response of school systems to enhancing Aboriginal students' wellbeing; 4. Contribute significant conceptual advances in Indigenous theory, research evidence and practice by: identifying effective collaborative strategies between schools and communities that aim to enhance Aboriginal students' wellbeing (Study 1), explicating key cultural learnings and cultural safety strategies that enable Aboriginal students' wellbeing (Study 2), and testing the impact of a novel cultural learnings program on Aboriginal students' wellbeing, the wellbeing of Aboriginal people delivering the program, and the school community (Study 3). We expect that a positive shift in children's knowledge of their racial identity will encourage positive shifts in related self-esteem. Ultimately, we predict that positive racial identity and related self-esteem will promote children's wellbeing and thereby encourage attendance at school.

The interplay of Aboriginal culture, self-esteem, wellbeing and education are under-researched in Australia. This project is fundamental for economic, social and environmental benefits because it will provide an urban Aboriginal worldview and interrelations of identity, country, culture and kin as catalysts for improved wellbeing. The research team will add to the quality of skilled researchers specializing in this field in Australia. Ideally, this project aims to help retain Aboriginal scholars in higher education.

FEASIBILITY AND RESOURCING – DESCRIPTION OF THE SUPPORT THIS PROJECT WILL RECEIVE:

The project has confirmed funding as an Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous project for up to four years, so will provide an opportunity for an HDR student to be part of the research process from commencement to the dissemination phase. HDR students will be supported as part of the research team with budget considerations for possible conference attendance, travel and general consumables. The chief investigator is also keen to provide training in Aboriginal ways of working in culturally secure protocols and to build capacity and career pathways for Aboriginal students wishing to further their tertiary education.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT/ PROGRAM FOR THE ENROLLING SCHOOL OR INSTITUTION:

National Australian policies are now beginning to recognise the importance of culture, identity and related self-esteem upon the health and educational outcomes of Aboriginal children. This
project will further demonstrate the federal government’s commitment to Aboriginal health and educational outcomes but importantly, it will encourage and foster research in these disciplines and in this topic area of social and emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, with the recent opening of the Curtin University Midland campus, this research project is key to establishing and maintaining positive connections to the Aboriginal communities in this area by addressing the health and education implications of Aboriginal children.

Students must express interest in this scholarship opportunity by emailing the Project Lead listed below. Please provide a copy of your current curriculum vitae and detail your suitability to be involved in this strategic project.

**PROJECT LEAD CONTACT:**

Name: Cheryl Kickett-Tucker  
School: School of Education  
Faculty: Humanities  
Email: Cheryl.kickett-tucker@curtin.edu.au  
Contact Number: 08 9266 2644