

Terminology Guide: Aboriginal Peoples




CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ACKNOWLEDGE UNDERSTAND RESPECT




Acknowledge Understand Respect



The Bishops' Mandate makes it clear that "the values of the Gospel lead to genuine peace and harmony. They make easier the promotions of reconciliation, justice, compassion and mercy" (Mandate, 21). In addition, the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia's Aboriginal Education Policy calls for Catholic schools to "embrace the richness and diversity that exists both within and across Australia's many Aboriginal nations". As a Catholic system, we are called to uphold Gospel values and social justice teachings to educate all Australian children, including the true history of our country. Unfortunately, Australia's relationship with the First Peoples of this country has been shaped by colonisation and subsequent protectionist policies. Acknowledging and learning the truth of our past helps the nation heal on its reconciliation journey.

In the 1997 Bringing Them Home Report, the Australian Human Rights Commission suggests that much of the language used in the past to identify and discuss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was, and still is offensive. Terms such as 'full blood', 'half caste', 'quadroon' and 'octoroon' were applied to First Peoples as a way of ostracising and labelling as less-than human. Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been collectively and relentlessly *othered*. More recently these terms have been succeeded by labels such as *Aboriginal* or *Indigenous*, emerging from a governmental push to collectively identify and address the First Peoples of Australia.

Pope Francis refers to "the radicalism of the Gospel in a society which has grown comfortable with social exclusion, polarisation and scandalous inequality".



These guidelines have been developed to assist Catholic Education Western Australia staff navigate the terminology and meanings in relation with the First Peoples of our country. This document moves language in Catholic education beyond "correct" and "incorrect" usage into the language of social justice. By acknowledging and understanding the power of the language we use in Catholic education settings, we can communicate with informed and respectful intent.

These guidelines recognise the power that English has as the dominant language in Australia, as the vehicle for communicating law, education, media, and politics. English is also a potential vehicle for discrimination and prejudice, as cultural values and attitudes are conveyed in the structures and meanings of the language we use. When using language in a powerful social institution, such as Catholic Education Western Australia, the way that we write and speak matters.

Please note that these guidelines do not give all the answers to this very complex subject, however they help you begin. As lifelong learners, Catholic education staff are encouraged to expand their knowledge by referring to other sources, some of which are listed at the end of this document and are available from the Aboriginal Education Team.

Contents



1.0	Why Terminology Matters	4
1.1	Aboriginal v Indigenous v ATSI	5
1.2	Peoples v People	5
1.3	Capitalisation	5
1.4	More appropriate and less appropriate terminology	6
1.5	Specificity	9
1.6	Other Key Considerations	9
2.0	Welcome, Acknowledgement and Recognition	12
2.1	Welcome to Country	12
2.2	Acknowledgement of Country	13
2.3	Imagery and Art	13
3.0	Evolving Communications	16
4.0	Aboriginal Education Team, Sources and Resources	17



Sue Hawkins
The Bat and the Crocodile
An Aboriginal story
Told by Jack Doolmy and Hector Jewellery
Compiled by Pamela Loff

Waakarl
Storyteller: Dorothy Yurleeen Womar
Illustrator: Karen Wimar
Noongan Wadjak

Kooba Djer-Djer
Red Robin and Blue Wren
Boodalang Mililyang
Pelican and Heron
Storyteller: Tjaneke Welley
Original Illustrations: Theresa Welley
Noongan Wadjak

Why Terminology Matters

1.0

Historically, the relationship between Australian institutions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been tumultuous. Language was often used to disempower and ostracise communities, positioning First Peoples as something other than the norm. Today, much of the terminology used in public discourse has been forced on Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples, who mostly refer to themselves by their sovereign group names. Using the best terminology where ever possible reaches beyond doing the right thing, to an act of social justice and decolonisation.





1.1 Aboriginal v Indigenous v ATSI

It should be recognised that any English terms used to name the first people of this country are imposed, and with that are politically powerful.

Although the term 'Aborigine' is grammatically correct, it has negative historic connotations and should not be used. 'Aboriginal' should be used as an adjective, not a noun. For example, Aboriginal person, Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal children, or Aboriginal women. It is always preferable, if known, to identify an Aboriginal person and a Torres Strait Islander person separately. It is not appropriate to use pronouns, such as the, those, these or our before 'Aboriginal' when referring to people. The term 'Aboriginal' should never be abbreviated.

'Indigenous' is a homogenising term, often used to identify groups of animals or plants native to a country. It is not recommended to use terms such as Indigenous or the shortening of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ATSI.

The use of the term 'First Australians' is also not appropriate, nor indeed factual. The 1967 Referendum decision finally included First Peoples in the census, making Aboriginal peoples the last Australians.

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia's Catholic Education Aboriginal Committee consulted community to develop protocol information for the appropriate use of terminology across the system. As such, staff are advised that in the context of CEWA, Aboriginal is the preferred term when collectively referring to the First Peoples of this country, and respectfully includes Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1.2 Peoples vs people

The plural 'peoples' can be used to recognise that the Aboriginal population of Australia is made up of multiple distinct groups, whereas 'Aboriginal people' can appear homogenising. It is, however, acceptable to use 'Aboriginal people' when referring to separate Aboriginal populations.

1.3 Capitalisation

CEWA capitalises the term 'Aboriginal' peoples and persons. This is consistent with the larger global community of specific demographics, for example American or European people.

Individual language groups, such as 'Yamitji' or 'Yawuru' are always capitalised, as are formal titles such as 'Elder'. To express the importance of the ongoing connection to land, the term 'Country' is also capitalised.

1.4 More Appropriate Terms and Less Appropriate Terms

Naming:

More Appropriate: Aboriginal peoples (preferred), Aboriginal Australians, First Peoples.

Less Appropriate: Aborigine, Natives, Aboriginals, Blacks, Coloureds, or any reference to part-Aboriginal or full-blood

Terms such as Aborigine or natives, or any reference to blood quantum are reminiscent of the protectionist era, and should not be used in any communications.

Self-identified collective terms such as Koori (NSW), Murri (Qld), and Noongar (South West WA) are appropriate for the areas where they apply. It is always better to find the local names for particular Aboriginal language groups where possible, for example Bardi or Arrernte peoples. Local Aboriginal people can clarify appropriate use of these and other terms.



Social Structures:

More Appropriate: Peoples, Aboriginal nations, communities, mobs, language groups, cultural groups.

Less Appropriate: Tribe, clan.

'Tribe' and 'clan' are archaic European words that carry Westernised presumptions about Aboriginal peoples. Early colonisers imposed hierarchical structures over Aboriginal groups, identifying 'Kings' or 'Chiefs' for authorities to deal with, enforcing conformity. Rather than trying to understand the gerontocracy-based Aboriginal groups, there was forced conformity to Western standards.

Aboriginal nations, communities, peoples, or the local cultural group name is more appropriate. It is important to note that due to an education with imposed terminology, many Aboriginal people may still use the term 'tribe'. This should be respected. The term 'mob' is often used by Aboriginal people, however as an Aboriginal English word, local people should determine the appropriateness of its use.

Relationship to Country:

More Appropriate: Seasonal/rotational occupation, complex and diverse societies, efficient resource managers.

Less Appropriate: Ancient, primitive, simple, native, prehistoric, nomads, traditional, contemporary, modern.

Education in Australia has for years taught that Aboriginal peoples were nomadic hunter-gatherers. Recent studies have shown that the terminology used to describe Aboriginal peoples, such as 'nomadic', facilitated dispossession through colonisation. Australia was colonised through the doctrine of terra nullius, using the myth of nomadism to prove that Aboriginal peoples did not occupy the country, but merely wandered across it. The 1992 Mabo Native Title judgement by the High Court rejected terra nullius as wrong both in fact and in law.

Further, more recent research tells a different story. Drawing from evidence in early explorers diaries, Pascoe (2014) asserts that Aboriginal groups had complex agricultural economic systems that included

grain harvesting, dam building, permanent housing structures, and irrigation.

Referring to Aboriginal peoples as 'nomadic' or 'primitive' implies that Aboriginal societies are not as 'advanced' as European ones and that Aboriginal peoples are less evolved.

Referring to Aboriginal people as 'traditional', 'contemporary', 'urban' or 'remote' is problematic and often very offensive. It is essential that these terms are not used in communications. Where cities are now located were places where Aboriginal peoples often bore the first waves of colonisation. As a result, there are often misconceptions by the wider community that 'urban' Aboriginal people are not 'real' or 'authentic' and that only 'traditional' or 'remote' Aboriginal people have culture. This common assertion is extremely offensive.

It is important to remember that many Aboriginal people living in urban settings have strong links to Country, both to the city they live in and/or to regional or remote places. Using more appropriate terms helps to avoid labelling, categorising and stereotyping.





Spirituality and Cultural Practices:

More Appropriate: The Dreaming, the specific name related to the language group.

Less Appropriate: The Dreamtime, myths, folklore, legends, stories.

The word “Dreamtime” tends to indicate a time period that has finished. In reality, the Dreaming(s) are ongoing across the country. The term Dreaming(s) describes Aboriginal beliefs that embrace the past, the present and the future – much more than a singular period of creation. Australian Anthropologist, Stanner (1956), describes The Dreaming as ‘everywhen’:

“One cannot ‘fix’ The Dreaming in time: it was, and is, everywhen”... The Dreaming “... has ... an unchallengeable sacred authority”.

Different cultural groups have specific names for Dreamings, for example Bugarrigarra (in Yawuru) or Jukurrpa (in Warlpiri). Local Aboriginal people can clarify

appropriate use of accepted terms.

Using words such as ‘myth’, ‘story’, ‘folklore’, or ‘legends’ conveys the impression that information from the Dreaming as trivial, untrue, or happened long ago. These words can also convey the impression that Dreaming Stories are fairy tales rather than complex creation beliefs.

History:

More Appropriate: Invasion, colonisation, occupation

Less Appropriate: Settlement

A truthful understanding of Australian history shows that the country was not settled peacefully, but invaded, occupied and colonised. Describing the arrival of the British as ‘settlement’ gives a Westernised view of history, muting and diminishing the great loss of Aboriginal life that occurred from 1788. The use of ‘settlement’ ignores the Doctrine of Discovery and lands stolen on the legal falsehood of terra nullius, and also ignores the resistance of Aboriginal groups.

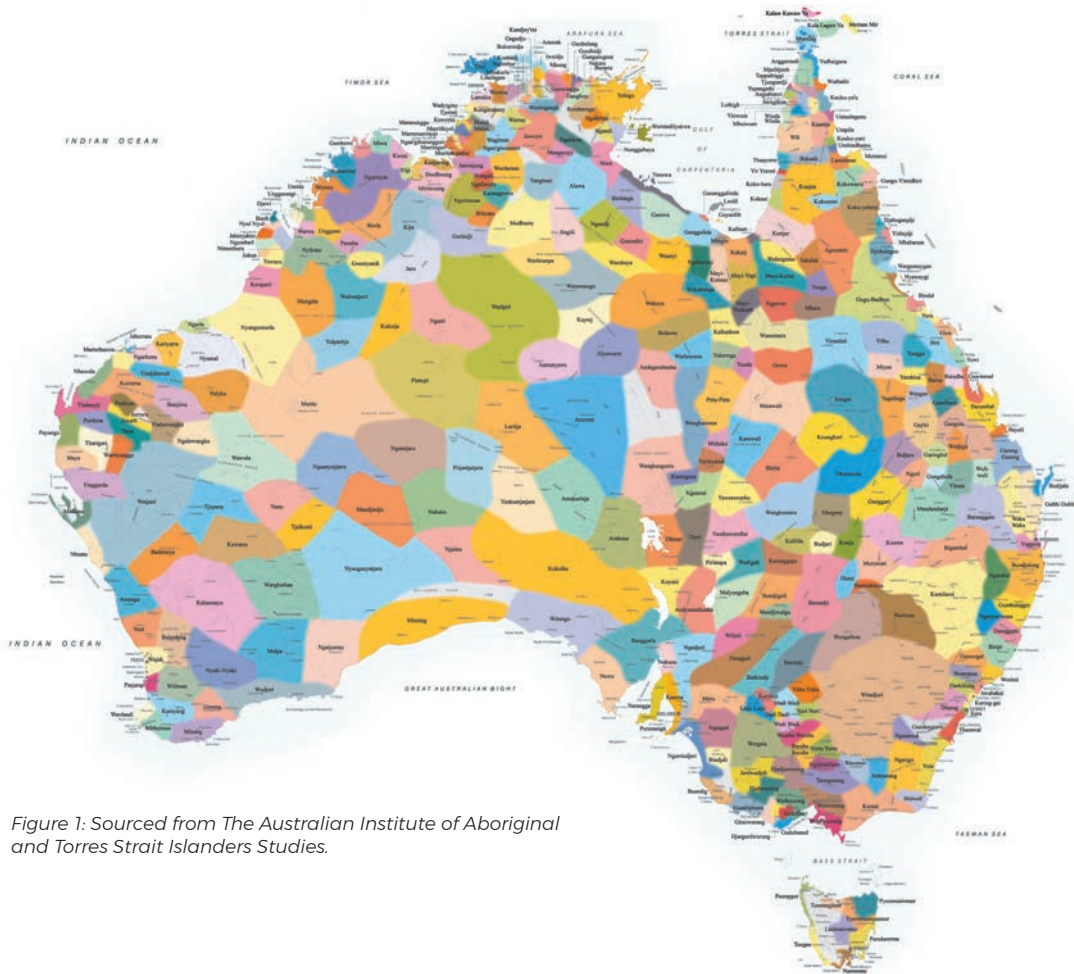


Figure 1: Sourced from The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies.

1.5 Specificity

Where possible, it is best to take the time to find out the name of the language group you are referring to. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, 1994) have developed a language map showing a large number of language groups and regions across Australia (Figure 1). Although not exhaustive, this is a very good place to start.

1.6 Other Key Considerations

Sorry Business

The grieving period for Aboriginal people who have passed away is generally known as Sorry Business. In a number of Aboriginal communities, the name of a passed person

cannot be used for a period of time, and another name is often given in its place. This can last for many months, and sometime years. In addition, it is common that pictures of the passed person will be removed and not shown in communities without prior warning. It is imperative that local Aboriginal communities are consulted before displaying names or pictures, should that information be in relation to the deceased. A warning should be given before sharing voices or images of Aboriginal people. For example:

WARNING: *Aboriginal people are warned that the following presentation may contain images, voices or names of deceased persons.*



Family and Kinship

Aboriginal family dynamics are often different to the Westernised nuclear family definition. In many cases, Aboriginal families are structured by complex and dynamic Aboriginal kinship systems which are regulated by social bonds, physical and emotional relationship to country, and connections to ancestral spirits. Figure 2 is a simplified, generic picture showing how many Aboriginal kinship systems can differ from non-Aboriginal family structures,

in terms of relational responsibility. The smaller grey text indicate the non-Aboriginal terms, while the larger black text shows the links and connections for many Aboriginal families. A child can have many mothers and many fathers, and also a large number of brothers and sisters. For many Aboriginal people, kinship and family are particularly important, carrying certain responsibilities for family members that are not apparent in non-Aboriginal families.

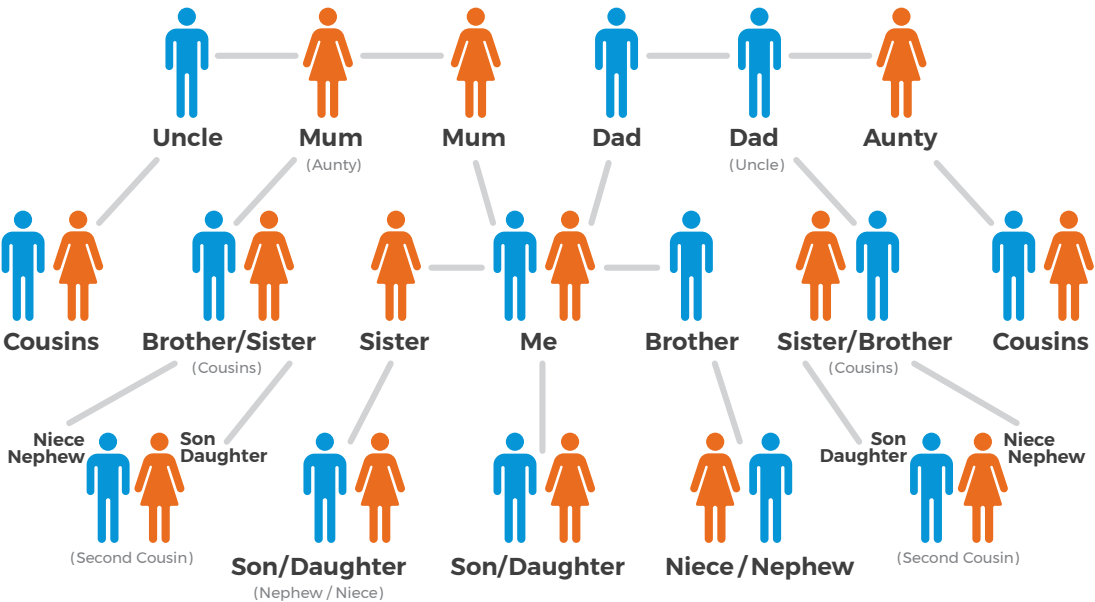


Figure 2: Simplified example of Aboriginal kinship systems. Based on a Northern Territory Department of Health resource



Welcome, Acknowledgement and Recognition

2.0

The following information regarding Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country has been extracted from one of Reconciliation Australia's fact sheets. You can find a link to the original in the resource section of these guidelines.

Aboriginal peoples have experienced a long history of exclusion from Australian history books, the Australian flag, the Australian national anthem and for many years, Australian democracy. This history of dispossession and colonisation lies at the heart of the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians today. Including recognition of Aboriginal people in events, meetings and national symbols is one part of ending the exclusion that has been so damaging. Incorporating welcoming and acknowledgement protocols into official meetings and events recognises Aboriginal peoples as the first people of this country and Traditional Custodians of land.

2.1 Welcome to Country

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have always been an important part of Aboriginal cultures. Despite the absence of fences or visible borders, Aboriginal groups had clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other groups. Crossing into another group's Country required a request for permission to enter. When permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during the journey. While visitors were provided with a safe passage, they also had to respect the protocols and rules of the land owner group while on their Country. Today, obviously much has changed, and these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances. However, the essential elements of welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place. A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English. A Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal people who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to welcome visitors to their Country.



2.2 Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for anyone to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal peoples to Country. It can be given by both non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people. There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following forms.

General: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Specific: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the (people) of the (nation) and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Similar to a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

2.3 Imagery and Art

Aboriginal art almost always contains important cultural knowledge, usually represented by symbols, colours or markings. While beautiful, it is often the case that artwork is purchased or displayed without the necessary acknowledgement of the creator. This can lead to a trivialisation of the important knowledge within the artefact. Aboriginal-related art should always be attributed to the artist, their cultural group, the name of the piece and location. Exploitation of Aboriginal art is a complex issue affecting not only on the artist, but also the larger cultural group.

When purchasing Aboriginal artefacts for gifts or resource purposes, it is essential to research the seller. Australia has a growing non-authentic Aboriginal artefact industry where original artefacts (painting, carvings, and instruments) are copied and mass produced overseas for cheap distribution back in Australia. You will find these in many of the tourism shops and cheap souvenirs. Although cost effective, these items are examples of cultural appropriation. Always ask: whose story is this, what is the story, where is the artist from, and most importantly is the artist an Aboriginal person.



If the seller cannot tell you, then look elsewhere. The general rule is that if there are hundreds of them in the store and they are shiny, lacquered and mass produced, they will not be authentic Aboriginal artefacts.

When using pictures and images of Aboriginal people or children for media purposes, as with all people, it is important to have permission. In terms of diversity, Aboriginal people are not defined by quantum measures or the colour of their skin. To avoid tokenism, make sure your

imagery is truly representative of your local Aboriginal population and that you are not exhibiting stereotypical images of Aboriginal people.

It is important to critique online content when sourcing information regarding Aboriginal peoples. As with art, dig deeper to find who has developed the page, where they have their information from, and if it is from an Aboriginal source. Avoid internet sources from outside of Australia.



Evolving Communications

3.0

“As with any living, adaptive language such as English, the ‘rules’ are in constant evolution and adjustment and part of the multi-faceted world it strives to represent. We have seen, in the past few years, for instance, a very rapid rise in the use of ‘Indigenous’ in both publications and in usage by community members. So if you are feeling less-than-confident in using certain terms in reference to Aboriginal peoples, keep in mind that fear of using the ‘wrong’ word should never stifle important dialogue and discussions that need to be had. And please do not be insulted or defensive if someone suggests a correction, but do try to understand the logic of the suggested change. While nuances can be challenging to understand and navigate at times, every effort should be made to be specific and use the correct word in any given context. As communicators, the goal is to provide consistent, clear language with the objective of being respectful, non-hierarchical, and inclusive at all times”.

University of British Columbia

“Communicating means sharing, and sharing demands listening and acceptance. Listening is much more than simply hearing. Hearing is about receiving information, while listening is about communication, and calls for closeness. Listening allows us to get things right, and not simply to be passive onlookers, users or consumers. Listening also means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and gifts at the service of the common good.”

Pope Francis, Jan. 22, 2016



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4.0

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Sources and Resources

This guide has been developed to provide advice about the language we use when communication information pertaining to Aboriginal peoples. Most of the information contained in these guidelines has been adapted from previous works on Aboriginal protocols and terminology by a number of reputable sources, all listed below:

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