



# SLI podcast series discussion guide ep. 19

## Lake Cargelligo Central School: culturally nourishing schooling

Use the discussion points below to reflect on your own leadership practice or as prompts for discussion with your leadership team. Choose the ones which resonate most in your context.

### Speakers

**Eliza Cooper:** Principal, Lake Cargelligo Central School

**Aunty Josie:** Aboriginal Education Officer, Lake Cargelligo Central School

**Joanne Jarvis:** SLI Director and host of the series

### Discussion points

#### 1. Building cultural safety

Eliza and Aunty Josie remind us that cultural safety is not created by policies or programs alone. It is built and sustained through relationships. At the heart of this is a genuine commitment to placing students at the centre, engaging meaningfully with the voices of parents and community, and practising deep, active listening.

“Because of the complexity I have to come from a stance of learning in order to understand more deeply. And Aunty Josie is the person I turn to and ask, ‘what do you think here?’”

Eliza Cooper

What does cultural safety currently look and feel like for Aboriginal students, families, and staff in your school? How do you know?

What steps might strengthen this in your daily practice?

How are you deliberately and consistently engaging student, family, and community voices, not just to inform, but to shape and lead the work?

Where might deeper listening transform not just your understanding, but your relationships and your leadership?

#### 2. Partnerships and community knowledge

Eliza and Aunty Josie describe co-leadership and shared decision-making as central to their authentic partnership. Recognition of Aunty Josie and other community knowledge holders as fellow leaders with deep expertise is critical to ensuring the school understands their community’s unique strengths and perspectives and can meet their needs.

How are Aboriginal community members and cultural knowledge holders included as partners in your school’s work?

In what ways could your school deepen these relationships with respect and reciprocity?

#### 3. Relational leadership

Eliza models a powerful commitment to building authentic relationships with Aboriginal staff, students, and community members through her willingness to ask questions, unlearn long-held assumptions, sit with discomfort, and practice patience. These actions reflect not just a leadership strategy, but a way of being.

What does this idea mean to you in the context of your leadership?

How do trust, patience, and vulnerability shape the quality of your relationships with others, especially those whose perspectives or experiences differ from your own?

Where in your current practice might you need to slow down in order to lead with greater depth, authenticity, and care?

#### 4. Student engagement and voice

To truly understand the challenges around engagement and attendance, Eliza and Aunty Josie chose to sit with students, listening deeply to their stories, perspectives, and lived experiences. This meant confronting ‘hard truths’ and engaging in courageous conversations with staff, as they worked collectively to address the complex barriers impacting Aboriginal students at Lake Cargelligo Central School.

**What are you noticing about Aboriginal student engagement, voice, and leadership in your setting? Whose voices are most often heard, and whose might be missing?**

**How might culturally responsive practices be used not just to support Aboriginal students, but to affirm their identity, amplify their leadership, and strengthen their sense of belonging and success?**

**What conversations might need to happen in your setting to more honestly engage with the barriers Aboriginal students face?**

#### 5. Professional learning and staff practice

Eliza and Aunty Josie reflect on the powerful personal and professional impact of cultural immersion, through cultural days and on Country experiences, which has led to a genuine shift in teaching practice. Teachers are no longer working in isolation; they’re actively seeking guidance from Aboriginal educators to shape lesson content and pedagogy. This isn’t just professional development, it’s transformational learning.

“Teachers want to learn. And that’s the biggest difference. And then they take that learning and bring that back to their classrooms, to their students.”

Aunty Josie Bailey

**How confident and capable are your staff in embedding local Aboriginal knowledges and cultural perspectives into their teaching?**

**To what extent are current efforts driven by deep curiosity and respect, rather than obligation or compliance?**

#### 6. Sustaining impact

Eliza reminds us that culturally nourishing schooling is not a ‘project’ with a start and end date; it’s a sustained way of being, grounded in relationships, reciprocity, and deep listening. Central to this approach is the leadership of Aboriginal educators, like the Aboriginal Education Officer, whose role is not an add-on but essential. Embedding cultural days and on Country experiences into the life of the school ensures that cultural learning is ongoing, protected, and not dependent on individual champions or short-term initiatives.

**What systems, roles or routines (formal or informal) in your school support leadership of culturally nourishing schooling?**

**What would it take to move from culture being an ‘event’ to it being part of your school’s DNA?**

**How might your leadership ensure that culturally responsive and relational practices are sustained, scaled, and deeply embedded, regardless of who holds the role?**